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# JOE THE SURVEYOR

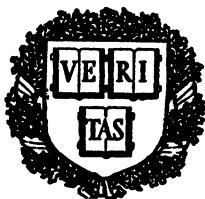


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# JOE THE SURVEYOR

OR

## THE VALUE OF A LOST CLAIM

BY

EDWARD STRATEMEYER

Author of "Old Glory Series," "Colonial Series," "Pan-American Series," "Bound to Succeed Series," "Ship and Shore Series," "Between Boer and Briton," "On to Pekin," and "American Boys' Life of William McKinley"

*ILLUSTRATED BY A. B. SHUTE*



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**JOE THE SURVEYOR**

## PREFACE

"JOE THE SURVEYOR" relates the trials and triumphs of a sturdy country lad who is compelled by the force of circumstances to go forth into the world and earn, not alone his own living, but also support for his twin sister and his invalid father.

The outlook at the start is black, but Joe is both bright and level-headed, and soon strikes up an acquaintance with a surveyor who is at work among the mountains of Pennsylvania, near Joe's home. The lad does the surveyor a good turn and for this is given a position as assistant. While at work Joe endeavors to right a wrong done to his father by a rascally partner, and this brings the youth into more than one peril. But in the end all ends happily, and Joe becomes the civil engineer he set out to be.

When this story was first published as a serial in "Good News," of which the author was then editor, it received generous praise from thousands of readers. In its revised form I sincerely trust it will prove equally entertaining to both the boys and the girls, and that none who read it will miss the moral that it teaches, namely, that honesty is not only "the best policy," but that it should be the only policy considered.

EDWARD STRATEMEYER.

*February 1, 1903.*



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# JOE THE SURVEYOR

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## CHAPTER I

### JOE OBTAINS A SITUATION

"You'RE not worth you're salt, young man!"

"I am sorry, Mr. Bemis, but I did the best I could. The gentleman said the drawing paper was not large enough. He wanted it at least twenty by thirty."

"Humph! if you had any brains and tact you could have talked him into buying what we have in stock."

"I tried my best, sir, but he said a smaller size would not answer his purpose."

Mr. Amos Bemis, the proprietor of the only book and stationery store in Mountainville, made a gesture of impatience.

"That's just another of your excuses," he returned. "As I said before, you are getting too lazy and indifferent to earn your salt. Now, I am sure I could have sold him all the paper he needed." And he drew himself up with a superior air.

Joe Hurley did not reply. He had done his best,

and told the truth in the matter, so what more was there to say?

Joe was a bright, manly boy of sixteen. He was the only son of John Hurley, a former prosperous plumber of the town, who was now, however, confined at home with a severe attack of rheumatism. Besides Joe and his father, there was one other member of the family, Meg, a bright girl, who was Joe's twin.

Ever since Mrs. Hurley's death, some three years before, things had gone wrong with the little family. First Meg was taken sick with a fever, and lay at death's door for four months. Then a rascally partner, named Bart Pangler, had cheated Mr. Hurley out of nearly all the money he had invested in the plumbing business. While the plumber was trying to catch Pangler, and bring him to justice, he contracted rheumatism, and this confined him to the house and rendered him unable to work at his trade.

This last affliction was a sad blow to the family, for in the course of a year matters grew worse and worse, until they found themselves almost destitute. The doctor and the druggist had to be paid, as well as the grocer and the butcher. What remained of the plumbing shop was sold out, and one by one the dollars thus received melted away.

"There is no use talking, Meg, something has got to be done," said Joe, one day. "I must find work at something, no matter what it is."

"But I thought you had tried about every place in Mountainville," returned the sister, anxiously.

"So I have, and in Ironton, too. But I'm going to try again to-day and to-morrow, and if I don't succeed, I'm going to try my luck somewhere else."

"Where will you go, Joe?"

"Oh, to Harrisburg or Philadelphia."

"And leave father and me behind?" went on Meg, with a strong shade of anxiety in her voice.

"It can't be helped, Meg. We can't starve, and I may have some luck in a big city."

"I wouldn't like you to go away. I hope you find something in Mountainville or Ironton."

"So do I, so that I might stay home and help you with father when his attacks get worse."

A call from the next room, where Mr. Hurley lay on the lounge, had cut short the interview, and Joe had gone forth once more to hunt for work.

Mountainville was not a large town. Its houses did not number over two hundred, and many of these were little better than shanties. There were a score or so of stores, a blacksmith shop, and a tavern, and also the establishment kept by Amos Bemis, who, besides being bookseller, newsdealer and stationer, was a notary public, commissioner of deeds, and a dealer in real estate.

As Joe passed Amos Bemis' place he saw the stationer in the act of pasting a bit of white paper on

one of his show windows. Joe paused, and saw that the paper contained the words, rudely lettered:

*Boy Wanted.*

"Here's luck," he thought. "I hope I get that job. They say Mr. Bemis is a mighty hard man to get along with, but I guess I can manage it if I do my duty."

He entered the store, and the stationer and real estate dealer, turning from the show window, confronted him.

"Well, young man, what can I do for you?" he asked, with some slight show of pleasantness, for he took the boy to be a probable customer.

"I came in to see about that job, Mr. Bemis," replied Joe. "Do you think I will do?"

The pleasant look faded from Amos Bemis' face, and he surveyed Joe sharply with his ferret-like eyes.

"Come in to see about the place, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"You didn't lose any time."

"I was lucky enough to see you putting up the sign. If you remember, I was here before looking for work."

"Yes, I remember. You are John Hurley's boy. How is your father?"

"Not any better, sir."

"Did he ever catch Pangler?"

"No, sir."

"And ain't likely to, I reckon."

"I hope he does, and gets back his money."

"Oh, of course," replied Amos Bemis, indifferently.

"So you want this job. How much do you expect a week?"

"Whatever I am worth, sir."

"Well, that won't be much at the start, because I take it you don't know anything of storekeeping."

"I think I can learn quickly, sir. I will try my best."

Amos Bemis hesitated, and began to arrange a number of articles in the single long showcase of which the store boasted.

"Well, you see what I need mostly is a boy to take out papers and such when they come in, and mind shop when I'm out on business, which ain't very often."

"I am sure I could do that."

"It ain't hard work, and, of course, I couldn't pay much, especially at the start. If you want to come I'll try you and give you two dollars a week."

Joe's hopes fell at this announcement. Two dollars would not do much toward supporting the family. He hesitated, there was a struggle for something better within him, and he shook his head.

"I am sorry, Mr. Bemis, but I can't accept the offer."

"Why not?" demanded the stationer in astonishment.

"Because I must earn more. What I get in wages must support the family until father is able to go to work again."

"Humph! All right; I'll get somebody else."

Considerably crestfallen, Joe left the store and continued on his way up the one street of Mountainville.

He applied at the general stores, and the blacksmith shop for work, but without success. He would have tried the tavern or hotel, but that was such a low resort that his better nature revolted against it.

"I won't work around a place where liquor is sold, and men get drunk," he said to himself. "Poor as I am, I consider myself above that."

He was returning home rather downcast, when, on passing the stationer's, he heard a tapping on the window, and saw Mr. Bemis beckoning to him.

"Have any luck?" questioned the man, as Joe entered.

"No, sir."

"I thought you wouldn't have. There ain't many places open these hard times. What are you going to do now?"

"I am going to Ironton this afternoon, and if I can't find a job there I'm going to Harrisburg or Philadelphia."

"You won't get a job in those big places. The cities are overcrowded, so I've heard."

"I'll try it."

Amos Bemis coughed and cleared his throat several times.

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Joe," he said. "I've heard since you went away that you're an honest boy, and that your family need the money. Now, I want to be charitable to my neighbors, so if you want to come I'll give you two dollars and a half a week."

And Amos Bemis looked as if in making the offer he had done the greatest possible act of benevolence.

"I can't work for less than three dollars, Mr. Bemis," said Joe firmly. "I've made up my mind to that. It's little enough for a family of three, even though, fortunately, we have no rent to pay."

"Three dollars is a sight of money to pay to a boy."

"I will do what I can to earn it."

"I'll make it two seventy-five."

"Make it three dollars, Mr. Bemis, and I'll go to work at once. To-day is Friday, but you need not start to pay me until next week."

To this Amos Bemis at length consented; and so Joe became his clerk.

The boy found his task a hard one, but he stuck to it manfully, despite the fact that Amos Bemis nearly drove him to death, and grumbled incessantly when sales were not as heavy as he hoped to see them.

After his failure to make a sale Joe put the drawing paper away in a drawer in which it belonged. Mr. Amos Bemis watched him with fault-finding eyes.

"Now, don't tear half the sheets," he stormed. "Hold up! Did you mark up that first one?"

"No, sir. That was done by Mr. Noble when you and he were talking about that land deal on Hooker Mountain."

"Are you sure? Well, take a dry bread crust—there is one on the back shelf—and rub it off. I can't afford to lose a big sheet of drawing paper like that."

Joe got the bread crust, and set to work with great care. Amos Bemis donned his hat, and took up the cane he invariably carried.

"Now, mind and take good care of things while I am gone," he admonished. "And be sure and sell all the goods you can. I don't want another customer like that to get away. Times are too hard."

And he went out, leaving Joe in sole possession of the store.

## CHAPTER II

### JOE IN TROUBLE

JOE cleaned off the soiled sheet of drawing paper, and placed it away. Then he set to work to clean and dress the windows, as this was the day upon which this work was generally done.

He had just taken all the goods out of the bottom of the window, and procured a pail of water and a sponge, when he noticed a man staggering in the street.

The man was still young, but his face bore an old look, the effects of dissipation. He was evidently intoxicated, and he only saved himself from a fall into the dirt of the road by clutching at the hitching post in front of the store.

"It's a shame for a young fellow to get drunk like that," thought Joe, as he set down the water to watch the young man. "Why can't he keep a level head on his shoulders, and not make a beast of himself?"

The young man steadied himself by the post for a moment, and then moved toward the store door. Joe hoped he would not enter, but in this he was disappointed. The young man, after a prolonged effort, managed to open the door, and then fell rather than walked in.

He supported himself at the counter, and glared at Joe unsteadily.

"Say, young feller, is this the stationery store?" he demanded.

"It is," replied the boy. "What can I do for you?"

"Want some drawin' paper."

"What size, sir?"

"What's that to you? Lemme see what you've got."

In rather a doubtful way Joe brought forth several sheets of various size, thinking at the same time how much trouble the drawing paper was causing him that day. His manner seemed to anger the young man.

"Say, are you afraid I'm goin' to steal the paper?" he cried.

"Oh, no."

"Then what are you hesitatin' 'bout?"

"I would like to know what size you want."

"Twenty by thirty, or bigger, if you want to know so bad."

"Then I'm sorry, but we haven't it;" and Joe began to put the paper away again.

"See here, you can't bluff me, young feller!" cried the young man, shaking his fist wildly in the air.

"I am not bluffing you, sir. The largest paper we have is eighteen by twenty-four."

"Say, do you know who I am?"

"I do not; but that makes no difference; I——"

"I'm Gus Bink, the Government surveyor, do you hear?"

"Yes, I hear."

"And I want that paper, and quick, too."

"I haven't it. You had better try somewhere else, Mr. Bink."

"You can't bluff me," cried the unreasonable Mr. Bink, pounding on the counter with his fist. "Trot out that paper, or I'll smash things in here!"

Joe began to grow alarmed at this threat. He saw that the intoxicated man was looking to make trouble, and he wondered what he had best do to get rid of the fellow.

"Do you hear me?" stormed Mr. Bink, after a few seconds of silence.

"I do; but as I haven't the size paper you want I can't supply you," replied Joe, firmly. "If you want the paper you'll have to go somewhere else for it."

"Have to? Who give you the right to boss me, I'd like to know?" howled the unreasonable one. "Say, how do you like that?"

He leaned over the counter, and before Joe realized what was coming, slapped the boy in the face.

The blow was not a hard one, but Joe was just then in an ill mood to receive anything of the sort. He was a strong boy for his age, and with a single leap he was over the counter, and had the young man by the collar.

"Now, you'll get right out of here!" he cried. "And don't you dare to come back, either!"

The intoxicated young man tried to reply, but for once his tongue seemed to fail him. He made a slight show of resistance, but before he realized it he was out in the street again, and Joe had closed the store door upon him.

Joe watched him for a few minutes, and noted with some satisfaction that the young man turned and staggered away.

The boy placed the drawing paper away once more, and took up the pail of water and set it on the bottom of the show window.

Crash! Something struck one of the lights of glass, and Joe started back in alarm. Crash! A second light was smashed, and then Joe saw that two pieces of coal, which had been picked up from the street by the intoxicated young man, had caused the mischief.

He looked out and was just in time to see the young man disappear around the side of the blacksmith shop, on the opposite side of the road.

For the instant Joe did not know what to do. Then he leaped out through the door and gave chase.

But when the side of the blacksmith shop was reached the young man had disappeared, and although Joe prolonged his search longer than he should have done, he could not find the fellow.

With rather a heavy heart he walked back to the

store. He realized that matters were going against him.

As he entered he was followed by Amos Bemis. The proprietor gave one look at the wrecked glass, and then fastened his sharp eyes on the boy.

"Joe, what does this mean?" he thundered, angrily.

"It is not my fault, Mr. Bemis," began the boy.  
"A drunken young man did that."

"What! What!" shrieked the stationer. "Don't tell me stories! You did that in trying to clean the window! It's as plain as day!"

"And I say I didn't!" retorted Joe, stung to the quick at the insinuation that he had told an untruth. "A young man calling himself Gus Bink came in here and started a row, and when I put him out he threw these pieces of coal at the glass."

"I don't believe a word of it! Bink! I never heard of such a person in these parts! It's all a story to clear yourself! You are as clumsy as you are lazy!"

"But, Mr. Bemis——"

"I won't listen to any explanations made up to suit the occasion! That glass is worth a dollar a pane, and more. You'll have to pay for it."

"I didn't break the glass, it was not my fault that it was broken, and I won't pay for it!" declared Joe.

He was angry at the way he was being treated, and his anger made him reckless.

"You won't pay, eh?"

"No, Mr. Bemis. If it was my fault I would, but in this case——"

"Not another word, young man, not another word! I won't have my clerk saying what he will do, and what he won't. You can take your hat and get out, the sooner the better."

"You discharge me?"

"I do. Now clear out."

"Very well. How about my wages for the half week?"

"That will go to pay for the broken glass."

Joe tried to argue the point, but the stationer, who was in an extra bad humor, through having failed to effect a sale of real estate, would not listen, and at last the boy was compelled to leave the store without a cent of the money that was justly due to him.

## CHAPTER III

### A MOMENT OF PERIL

JOE was in a bitter frame of mind as he left Amos Bemis' store. He considered that he had been unfairly treated, and that the stationer had acted with positive hatred toward him.

"Mr. Bemis is down on me, for one thing," he muttered to himself. "He never was very nice, but lately he has been worse than ever."

Joe wondered what he was to do next. He knew it would be useless to look for another situation in Mountainville, for ever since he had become a clerk in the stationery store he had been on the lookout for something better, but without success.

"I'll try Ironton this afternoon," he thought, as he walked homeward. "And if that doesn't help me, then I'm off for Harrisburg first thing in the morning."

It did not take him long to reach the little cottage which had been his home for several years—in fact, ever since they had come to Mountainville. Meg was away, doing some sewing for a neighbor, and his father sat in the window, where the sun could fall upon his rheumatic limbs.

"Well, father, how do you feel?" questioned the lad as cheerily as he could.

"Not quite as well as yesterday, Joe," replied Mr. Hurley, as with an effort he shifted his position. "But what brings you home this time of day?"

"I'm not to work for Mr. Bemis any more," replied the boy.

And he briefly narrated what had occurred to bring about the change.

"I hope you don't blame me for what I did," he added.

"I do not, Joe. Amos Bemis is a miserly fellow to deal with, and it is a wonder to me that you have remained there so long. But what do you propose to do now?"

"I'm going over to Ironton as soon as I've had a lunch. Perhaps I shall strike something there."

"I hope so, my boy, for now I'm down, we have to depend on you." Mr. Hurley mused for a moment. "Joe!"

"Well, father?"

"Now that Meg is away, I want to talk to you a bit in confidence. Do you remember where the old Coal Road crosses the Ironton turnpike?"

"Yes, just this side of the Italian shanties."

"Well, when you are on your way to Ironton, or on your way back, I wish you would strike off to the north

on the Coal Road for a distance of about five hundred feet."

"What for?"

"About five hundred feet," repeated Mr. Hurley, "and then go down in the gully and look among the bushes for a tin box painted blue."

"A tin box painted blue!" said Joe, wonderingly. "Why, what makes you think such a box is down there?"

"I'll tell you another time," replied the father somewhat hurriedly. "I see Meg is coming back. Don't forget to look, will you?"

"I'll look," replied Joe; and the next instant Meg entered, and the story of his discharge had to be told over again.

"The mean old miser!" cried Meg, stamping her foot. "Don't you ever go near him again, Joe!"

"I don't intend to, Meg. But come, get me a bit of lunch, and then I'll be off for Ironton."

The meal was soon prepared, and Joe ate rapidly. Then, with a cheery word to his sister, and a meaning glance at his father, he set out.

The distance to Ironton was all of five miles, over a rough mountain road, upon which were situated but few houses. The boy started off with a whistle, but soon this ceased, as the thought of what his father had asked him to do filled his mind.

"A tin box painted blue," he thought, "and father

wants me to look for it at the bottom of the gully. I wonder what it can mean? Can it be some box he lost when he was prospecting for an oil well. If it isn't that, I'd like to know what it can be."

But all Joe's speculations on the subject would not answer the question, and finally he grew so curious that he decided to seek the spot at once, and not wait until his return from Ironton, as had been his original intention.

The crossing his father had mentioned was soon reached, and then the boy started up the Coal Road, as it was called.

This was nothing more than a footpath leading around the base of the mountain to an abandoned coal mine. Joe paced off what he calculated was five hundred feet, and then grasped several bushes preparatory to letting himself down in the gully, which at this point was between twenty and thirty feet deep, with a tiny mountain stream flowing at the bottom.

Just as Joe caught hold of the bushes he was startled to hear a voice close beside him.

"Say, boy, where ye goin'?"

Joe looked around and saw two burly miners—at least their appearance seemed to indicate that they were such—resting on a number of rocks only a few feet away.

"What's that?" returned Joe, hardly knowing how to reply to the question.

"I say, where ye goin'?" repeated the man who had spoken.

"I'm going down to the bottom of the gully."

"What for?" questioned the second man, stretching himself, and sitting up.

"What for? Haven't I right to go down there if I wish?" replied Joe, resolved to put on a bold front.

"Certainly ye have; I was only axin' ye out of curiosity, that's all. Got any terbacker with ye?"

"No, I don't use it."

"Ho! ho!" laughed the other man. "Don't use it? Why, I thought every man an' boy in these parts used terbacker."

"Well, I don't."

"Ain't got anythin' to drink, nuther, have ye?"

"No."

"Got any money to give away?"

"No, indeed, I haven't got a cent. I am on the road to Ironton to look for work."

"Is that straight?"

"Yes."

"Then ye are on the wrong road, goin' down the gully," and the man laughed, while his companion joined in.

"Thank you," said Joe, and he turned and walked away.

He had changed his mind about going down in the gully just then. He would wait until returning from

Ironton, and would then make sure that no one saw him making his search.

He was soon on the main road again, and had nearly forgotten the men he had met. Little did he dream under what circumstances he would meet them again.

About a mile outside of Ironton he came upon a surveyor who was just setting up his instruments to take the measurements of a piece of land. He was rather surprised to find that the surveyor was the first man who earlier in the day had applied at the stationery store for some large drawing paper.

The surveyor did not recognize Joe, and the latter stood by for a moment watching the preparations that were going on.

"That's work that would just suit me," thought Joe to himself, as he set his face toward Ironton once more. "I would like to be a first-class surveyor and civil engineer."

Ironton was not much larger than Mountainville. There were four stores and two blacksmith shops, and a fairly good hotel, at which the Mountainville stage stopped twice a day.

But although Joe tried every place he could think of in Ironton, outside of the hotel, the boy was doomed to disappointment.

"More boys than we can use here," said Mr. Black, the proprietor of the largest store. "Better go back

into one of the mines, or look for a job around the oil wells."

"No, if I can't get work here I'm going to try Harrisburg or Philadelphia," replied Joe. "I want to get something better than coal mining or oil well tending to do."

"Well, you won't get it in Ironton, I'm thinking," returned Mr. Black, and Joe had to admit that he was about right.

The sun was just setting behind the high mountains when Joe started to return home. He walked rapidly, for he wished to reach the gully and explore the place while it was yet light.

"What could the tin box painted blue contain?" he kept asking himself, and he wondered if his search would be successful.

At last the gully was reached. He looked carefully about him to make sure that he was not being observed by anyone, and then he started to go to the bottom.

He had passed downward a distance of ten feet, and was on the point of dropping the remaining distance, when a cry caused him to pause.

"Help! help!"

The cry was uttered in a man's voice. It came from a point but a short distance up the Coal Road.

"Help! help!" came the cry again, but this time in fainter tones.

"Something is wrong, that's certain," thought Joe,

and without further hesitation he drew himself up to the level of the road again. "That sounds as if somebody had gotten into a tight hole and couldn't get out. Perhaps a man has fallen into some abandoned pit."

Guided by the cries, which were repeated several times, Joe ran up the road until a sudden turn brought him upon a most unexpected and thrilling scene.

There, close to one side of the road, was a man battling valiantly, as if for his very life, with two brawny ruffians, each of whom was armed with a heavy club. The man was the surveyor Joe had met on the road but a few hours before.

## CHAPTER IV

### JOE COMES TO THE RESCUE

THE man who had been attacked on the road was evidently getting the worst of the battle, for just as Joe appeared he staggered back, struck by the club in the hands of the larger of the two ruffians.

For an instant Joe was too surprised to speak. Then he cried out, sharply:

"Hi! stop that!"

Both of the ruffians turned in alarm, and lowered their clubs. But when they saw it was only a boy who had uttered the command, they muttered ejaculations of contempt.

"Don't mind him, Sam," said one.

"Say, Olney, it's the youngster we met down by the gully a couple of hours ago," replied his companion, quickly.

"So I see."

By this time Joe had advanced to within a few yards of the ruffians. He now recognized them as the pair who had wanted him to give them tobacco, drink, or money.

"Save me! save me!" groaned the surveyor, who was leaning up against a pile of rocks, with one hand clasped to his forehead. "The villains mean to murder me."

"You let that man alone!" cried Joe, warmly.  
"Let him alone, and clear out."

"Ho! ho! but you're mighty big for your boots, ain't ye?" laughed the larger of the ruffians, the one called Olney.

"You shall not harm this man any more," returned Joe. "You have no right to touch him."

"Yes, but we're a-takin' the right," put in he called Sam. "The best thing you can do is to make tracks, an' waste no time doin' it."

"Don't leave me," pleaded the surveyor.

"I don't intend to," said Joe.

He sprang back across the road to where a tree lay, broken down by the last storm. In a moment he had a small limb twisted loose, and this he formed into a rough club.

"Now leave, or we'll come to blows!" he said, more firmly than ever.

The two roughs looked at him with angry eyes. Then without a word the larger of them sprang at Joe, aiming a wicked blow at the boy's head.

Joe dodged, and then struck out in return. By good luck the ruffian received the club across his chin, and he went down on his back.

"Good! good!" shouted the surveyor, much encouraged by the sight. "I must see if I cannot find a stick."

He sprang away from the second rough, and soon

had a good heavy switch in his possession. Then the four closed in upon each other, and the blows fell thick and fast on both sides.

The surveyor was naturally a brave man, and as soon as he could recover somewhat from the first attack, which had been a most foul one, he showed his courage by going at Olney, while Joe fought the fellow called Sam.

The ruffians were getting decidedly the worst of the encounter. They attempted to rally, but just then out upon the main road several men could be heard talking on their way home from a neighboring coal mine, and in alarm Olney whispered to his companion, and both sped up the mountain side, leaving the surveyor and Joe masters of the situation.

"Thank fortune they have gone!" panted the surveyor, as he leaned up against the rocks again to catch his breath.

"Are you hurt much?" questioned Joe, anxiously.

"I can't say yet. I reckon there are no bones broken. But they attacked me unawares, and gave me a couple of pretty stiff cracks on the head. How do you feel?"

"Oh, I'm all right," and Joe took a deep breath.

"Your cheek is bleeding."

"It's only a scratch, sir, where the end of one of the ruffians' clubs grazed me."

"We were both fortunate to get out of it so well."

"Why did they attack you?"

"They wanted to rob me, I presume. I never saw either of them before. The young man who usually helps me is not along this afternoon, and I suppose they thought they would have a good chance to get my watch and pocketbook."

"I am glad I was able to come to your assistance, sir."

"And I am very thankful that you did, my boy. You shall not lose anything by your brave action. May I ask your name?"

"Joe Hurley."

"I presume you live close at hand."

"I live over in Mountainville. I have been to Ironton looking for work."

"Then you are out of a job? Been looking for work long?"

"Only since this morning."

"It seems to me I've seen you before."

"You did, sir. I tried to sell you some drawing paper this morning at Bemis' store, but the paper was not large enough."

"Oh, so you are the same boy! Then you have left your position at that store."

"I had to leave, but it wasn't my fault."

And seeing the look of curiosity in the surveyor's

face, Joe told the particulars of his encounter with the intoxicated young man.

"What! Did Bink act that way?" cried the surveyor, with some show of anger.

"He did. Then you know him?"

"He is the young man who assisted me on the surveys through this district. He went off last night to buy that paper, and I have seen nothing of him since. I thought he had reformed. When he shows up again I will discharge him, and when I pay him off I will see to it that you receive the money due you for the broken glass."

"I hope you won't discharge him on my account," said Joe, with a queer smile. "I know what it is to be out of work. Perhaps if you give him another chance he'll reform."

"I have already taken him back twice, and I told him that his next dismissal would be final. I will not have a young man around me who drinks. The work is too important for that."

"Was he a regular surveyor?" asked Joe, struck with a sudden idea.

"No, he knew little or nothing about the science. He was too easy-going to learn even when I tried to teach him."

"Then perhaps I could fill his place, sir. I would try my best to do the right thing, and would learn just as fast as I could."

"Well, I don't know." The surveyor mused for a moment, during which he gathered up his instruments and his satchel, which had been cast to one side of the road. "You are rather young."

"But I am strong for my age."

"Yes, you've proven that," with a laugh. "I don't know but that I might give you a chance. It would be no more than fair, for 'one good turn deserves another.'"

"When I was on my way to Ironton I saw you at work, and I was thinking then that this sort of thing would just suit me."

"I like surveying very much myself. As a general rule, I stick to railroad engineering, but I am out here to look up certain interests in these abandoned coal mines for a Philadelphia syndicate."

"Are you going to Mountainville?"

"Yes."

"Then let me help carry your traps. It's too much of a load for one person."

"Thank you; you can take those poles and the bag, if you will."

Joe did as directed, and the two started off. The boy thought it too dark to search the gully for the tin box painted blue, and resolved to let that project go over until the next day.

On the way to Mountainville the boy learned that the surveyor's name was Ralph Lumley. He was appar-

ently a nice man to deal with, and Joe congratulated himself when Mr. Lumley finally agreed to hire him.

"I will engage you for one week at five dollars," said the surveyor. "If you prove to be such a young man as I want I will keep you as long as I am in the neighborhood, and perhaps give you the chance of going back to Philadelphia with me."

"Thank you, sir. And when can I go to work?"

"To-morrow morning. Meet me at the tavern at seven o'clock."

"I will be on hand, sir."

The two were now entering the village, at the farther end of which stood the tavern. They had to pass Bemis' store to reach the place, and as they did so Joe saw Amos Bemis peering out of the door at him.

"Come in and see me, Joe," he called out.

"I can't just now, Mr. Bemis," returned the boy. "I'll come just as soon as I've taken these things up to the tavern for Mr. Lumley."

And Joe passed on before Amos Bemis had a chance to detain him.

In front of the only stopping place of which Mountainville boasted a surprise awaited the boy. Standing with his back against one of the posts of the porch was the disreputable young man who had been Ralph Lumley's assistant.

He started up when he saw the surveyor, and broke

forth in a jumble of mixed-up excuses and explanations. Mr. Lumley would not hear him out.

"You are discharged, Bink," he said, sternly. "I have heard all about your conduct here, and I wish nothing more to do with you. I will pay you off tomorrow, after I have learned the extent of the damage done by you at the stationery store."

At these words Gus Bink's face grew dark. Then he caught sight of Joe, and his face took on an expression full of hatred.

"This is your work," he muttered. "I'll get square, mark my word for it."

## CHAPTER V

### SOMETHING OF A MYSTERY

RALPH LUMLEY did not hear the words uttered by Gus Bink, for after speaking to the young man he had entered the door leading to the private hall of the tavern.

"You are mistaken," replied Joe. "I advised Mr. Lumley to take you back."

"Huh! Do you expect me to believe that?"

"Believe it or not, it's the truth. You can ask Mr. Lumley about it."

"Well, I don't care a rap for the old job," went on Bink, with a swagger. "But I won't allow a country boy to sit down on me; understand?"

And, with a determined shake of his head, he staggered off to the bar-room of the tavern.

Joe followed Mr. Lumley up the stairs to the latter's room. Here he deposited the articles he had carried in a corner, and then bid the surveyor good-night.

In a few minutes he was at Amos Bemis' store. He found the proprietor walking up and down rather nervously.

"You've taken your time about coming back," exclaimed Amos Bemis, rather crustily.

"I came just as quickly as I could," returned Joe, meekly.

"Did you get a situation in Ironton?"

"No, sir."

"I thought you wouldn't. It's mighty hard to get a place in a store unless you've got a recommendation."

"I suppose that's true, sir."

"Yes, you'll find it harder than ever in a big city like Harrisburg or Philadelphia."

"I have changed my mind about going to those places, at least for the present."

"I thought you would. It would be money thrown away on railroad tickets."

Amos Bemis paused and looked at Joe curiously.

"Why doesn't he ask to be taken back?" was the question in the man's mind. But Joe said not a word.

"I suppose I was rather hasty in discharging you," went on the stationer with an effort. "I know you support the family, and I don't want to be hard on you."

"You are very kind, Mr. Bemis, but——"

"So I'll take you back, Joe. But you must pay for the windows."

"Excuse me, Mr. Bemis, but you didn't let me finish. I do not wish to come back."

"You don't?"

"No, sir."

Amos Bemis opened his small eyes to their fullest extent. Never had he been more surprised. He doubted if he had heard aright.

"You don't want to come back?" he said, slowly.

"No, Mr. Bemis."

"Going to become an idler, eh, and live on what your poor sister can earn?"

"Hardly," returned Joe, his face flushing.

"That's about what it will amount to. You won't strike any situation, and——"

"Excuse me, but I have already struck one," interrupted Joe, with just the faintest trace of amusement in his honest eyes.

"You have? Who with?"

"Mr. Lumley, the surveyor."

"Humph! That won't pay much."

"He is going to give me five dollars a week."

"Five dollars! He's crazy! You won't earn half that!"

"I shall do my best, as I told him."

"He'll discharge you at the end of the first week."

"I hope not."

"Humph!"

Mr. Amos Bemis was considerably put out. To tell the truth, he had been much worried over Joe's going, having realized when too late that the boy was a great help to him, and that he would have great difficulty in drilling in another boy to take his place, if indeed he

could get one who would be so steady. Besides, he had another object in retaining Joe, which will appear later.

Joe left the store, as the stationer did not appear to have anything further to say; and five minutes of walking brought him home.

"What luck, Joe?" questioned Meg, eagerly, and his father looked up from the paper he was reading to hear the boy's reply.

"I'm going to be a surveyor, Meg," Joe returned.

"A surveyor?" questioned the sister. "What kind of a surveyor?"

"A land surveyor, of course. And after that I'm going to be a great civil engineer," and Joe put on a very important look.

"Joe, quit fooling and tell me the truth. Did you find work?"

"I am telling the truth. I have hired out with a surveyor, and he is going to pay me five dollars a week for my valuable assistance."

Meg made a movement as if to playfully bang him over the head with the broom, at which he pretended to be fearfully alarmed. Then he sat down and told both father and sister of what had occurred.

"What became of the two rascals?" questioned Mr. Hurley.

"I don't know, father, and I don't much care, if only they will leave Mr. Lumley and me alone in the future."

"You want to be careful, Joe; there are many tough men around these parts, and I should hate to see you get into serious trouble."

"Yes, Joe, do be careful," put in Meg. "And so you are really to get five dollars a week? That's nearly twice as much as Mr. Bemis paid you."

"Yes, and I'm sure Mr. Lumley will prove a nicer man to work for, too," added Joe.

As soon as he saw an opportunity he told his father confidentially that he had had no chance to explore the gully in search of the tin box painted blue, but that he would go early on the following morning if his parent wished it.

"You need not hurry yourself, Joe," said Mr. Hurley. "It is more than likely that the box is not there, although I wanted to make sure."

"Is it of great value?"

"It is, if it contains the papers which were in it the last time I saw the box. They were the title deeds to a tract of land in the northwestern part of the State. That land was thought to be of no value for a long time, but now oil wells have been located all around it."

"And the land belongs to you?"

"Yes, although Bart Pangler claimed an interest in it. The whole manner of buying the land was a mixed-up transaction, and I hardly know how I stand in it. But I should like to find those deeds."

"And how did they get into the blue box, and what makes you think the box is down in the gully?"

"Pangler and I had the box when we were in the plumbing business in Harrisburg, years ago. When I came here I brought the box with me. After he swindled me he stole the box. I followed him up, and caught him in the gully, but then the box was gone, and he stuck to it that he had never taken it. Before I could have him arrested he got away and disappeared entirely. Now, I've been thinking that perhaps he had the box, and threw it into the gully."

"But if so he might have gone back for the box."

"That is true, yet, even if he did, perhaps he didn't find it, for there are many holes and corners down there among the rocks and bushes."

"Can't you locate the land without the deeds?"

"No. I trusted Pangler in everything, and never paid much attention."

"Well, I'll look for the box the first chance I get, and I'll look a good many times, too."

Mr. Hurley was suffering more than usual that night, so Joe did not prolong the conversation. But he wondered if he would find the box.

Joe was up bright and early the next morning. It was a clear, warm day, and at least a quarter of an hour before the time appointed he was in front of the tavern, waiting for Ralph Lumley to make his appearance.

"I see you are on hand," observed the surveyor, as he came out with his traps.

"Yes, sir; I am anxious to learn how to survey."

"Well, you will find that it can't be learned in a day," laughed Ralph Lumley. "Surveying and civil engineering are sciences over which a life can be spent."

The two set out, Joe carrying all the poles and instruments, and the surveyor his satchel and a roll of drawing paper and a portable stand.

Their course was along the road to Ironton, and then westward to a small elevation known as Roxby Knob.

The Knob was soon reached, and under Ralph Lumley's directions Joe set up the tripod and got out the surveying chain.

"Now, if you will walk over to the hill yonder," began Ralph Lumley, "I will——"

The surveyor got no further. There was a hiss behind him, and a rattlesnake, fully five feet long, glided from the shadow of a nearby rock.

## CHAPTER VI

### AN UNEXPECTED ACCUSATION

DURING his varied experience Ralph Lumley had come in close quarters with numerous reptiles, but he had never before met so large a rattlesnake, nor one that seemed so aroused and angry.

With a cry to Joe to beware, he sprang to one side just as the snake raised its head in readiness to strike.

Joe was not slow in heeding the warning. He knew how deadly is the bite of the rattlesnake, and he had no wish to die just yet.

He perched himself on the top of a pointed rock, and the next instant found the surveyor beside him.

Seeing the movements of the two, the reptile lowered its ugly head, and glided forward toward the base of the rock.

"We must have disturbed it in some way," said Ralph Lumley, "or it would never bother us."

"I reckon I must have pitched the poles down on him," replied Joe. "He came from where they are lying."

The snake glided around to the rear of the rock, and then again raised its head.

By this time Ralph Lumley was feeling in his hip pocket.

"I'll shoot him," he said. "I provided myself with a pistol last night, in case we met those ruffians again."

He brought forth the weapon. As he did so Joe gave a cry and slipped backward almost on top of the reptile.

At once the rattlesnake flew up to bite the boy. There was that strange and dreadful rattle, and Joe appeared as if rooted to the spot.

Bang! it was Ralph Lumley's pistol that awakened the echoes across the hills, and the deadly snake fell back, shot through the neck.

It was by no means dead, and squirmed around at a fearful rate, coming in contact once with Joe's shoe, causing the boy to leap backward and stumble into the midst of a bush.

But Joe quickly recovered, and, picking up one of the poles, he went at the reptile with all vigor, and soon it lay on the ground cut into several pieces.

"There, he won't hurt anyone now," said Joe, as he stepped back and surveyed the dead snake. "But it was a close shave."

"It was," returned Ralph Lumley. "I had no idea that there were such large rattlesnakes in this region. We must be more on our guard in the future."

"Indeed, we must!" cried Joe. "Ugh! it gives me a shiver to look at it. But, Mr. Lumley, I must thank

you for what you did. He might have bitten me, and the poison might have killed me."

"Well, we are square now," returned the surveyor. "And let us hope that we shall meet neither rattlesnakes nor ruffians again."

After a brief spell, in which both tried to get over their scare, the surveyor gave Joe several more directions, and soon they were busy getting the angles and length of lines of a large plot of ground situated on the north and east of the Knob.

"This plot belongs to a syndicate in Philadelphia," said Mr. Lumley, while they were at work. "They bought it for a trifle, and they wished to know if the deed coincides with other grants of land around. Sometimes one grant overlaps another, and then there is a great deal of trouble."

"I should think surveyors would be careful," said Joe.

"They weren't very careful years ago. They did not have the best of instruments to work with, and, besides that, the descriptions in deeds are often very hard to follow. Here, for instance, is a copy of a deed for the land on the right of this claim. It says, 'starting from the left bank of Coal Creek at the big rock by the twin trees.' Now, the rock is there, but it is nearly six feet across, and six feet in width when it extends nearly half a mile in length is a good deal of land to gain or lose."

"What do you do in such cases?"

"Take the exact center of the rock if I think it has not shifted since the deed was made, otherwise I try to determine the position of the rock before it shifted."

"I see."

"Once I had a deed which read, 'from the north corner of the milk-house to the tree that was struck by lightning, and then westerly to John Baker's cow-shed.' When I came to survey the land I found that the milk-house was gone, so was the tree which had been struck by lightning, and only the rough foundation of the cow-shed remained. That was a tough job to bring to a satisfactory conclusion."

"I shouldn't think you could do it."

"I had to find witnesses to prove where the milk-house had stood, and I found one old woodsman who located the stump of the tree which had been struck by lightning."

And so the talk ran on until Joe took the end of the surveyor's chain and walked away to help measure a line of an angle Ralph Lumley had just determined.

The boy was greatly interested in the work, and was quite surprised when the surveyor told him it was after noon and that they would knock off for lunch.

Both had brought something to eat with them, and they sat down by a tiny stream for the meal, which lasted not quite half an hour.

Ralph Lumley asked Joe much about himself. He appeared to take to the boy, and Joe found him a most agreeable man in every respect.

During the afternoon they worked all over the top of the Knob. Often they had to jump over brooks and deep ravines, and once Joe nearly missed his footing and went down into a deep pocket.

"Use one of the poles for jumping over," said Lumley, and he then and there gave Joe a practical lesson in vaulting over a space much too wide to leap in the ordinary way.

At five o'clock the surveyor said that they would stop and return to Mountainville.

"You have done very well to-day, Joe," he added. "You are quite a different person from Bink, and I am glad of the change."

When the tavern was reached Joe found it was but quarter to six. At the risk of getting home late, he resolved to go back and make a half-hour's search in the gully for the blue box.

"I know father is anxious about it," he said to himself. "And I believe I am equally curious."

He was about to set out, when a small boy named Phil Darrow came running up to him.

"Hi, there, Joe!"

"Hullo, Phil!"

"Say, Old Bemis is looking all over for you," went on Phil Darrow.

"What does he want—to hire me again to tend shop?"

"I don't know, but he told father he supposed you had left Mountainville for good."

"Left Mountainville for good? What did he mean?"

"I don't know, but he's greatly excited."

"Where is he now?"

"Just gone back to his store," replied Phil Darrow.  
"You had better go and see him."

Joe mused for a moment. He knew very well what an excitable man his former employer was. Perhaps Phil had exaggerated, and Amos Bemis was only angry because he would not come back to work in the store.

"I'll stop in and see him to-morrow," he said to Phil.  
"Tell him that if you see him."

"Why don't you go now?"

"I've got something else to do."

Joe turned away toward the Iron-ton turnpike, but he had hardly walked a dozen yards before he heard a loud call from behind.

"Stop there! Stop, Joe Hurley!"

It was Amos Bemis' voice. He was running toward Joe as rapidly as his long legs would carry him.

Joe stopped. The next moment the stationer was beside him, and had him fast by the arm.

"What is it, Mr. Bemis?"

"You just come back to the store with me, and I'll tell you," exclaimed Amos Bemis, wrathfully.

Seeing that something was wrong, Joe turned and walked to the place mentioned, the stationer all the while retaining hold of his arm. They were followed by Phil Darrow and a couple of idlers, who were sure something worth seeing was about to occur.

"Now, then, young man, I have you where I want you," cried Amos Bemis, as he shoved Joe into the store and closed the door. "You shall not escape me again."

"I don't understand you, Mr. Bemis," returned Joe, as calmly as he could. "What is the trouble?"

"You know well enough, Joe."

"I can't say that I do. If it is about those windows——"

"Tut, tut, tut! Don't be foolish. Hand over what you have at once!"

"Hand over what I have? What do you mean?"

"You know, Joe. Now I don't want to make trouble, but unless you do as I say you'll spend the night in jail. Understand?"

"No, I don't. I haven't anything of yours, if that is what you mean."

"That's just what I do mean. You stole the pocket-book from my back desk, and unless you hand it right back you shall go to prison for it."

## CHAPTER VII

### A FRIEND IN NEED

JOE listened like one in a dream. Was it possible that Amos Bemis took him for a thief? He could hardly believe his ears.

But as he looked into those cold eyes he realized that the real estate dealer meant every word that he had uttered.

Amos Bemis still held him by the arm, acting very much as if he expected that Joe would bolt for the door and make his escape.

The boy at last, when he understood the full meaning of the accusation, pushed the man away.

"Do you mean to say that I stole your pocketbook?" he burst out, in righteous indignation.

"Yes, you did," returned Amos Bemis, "and it won't do any good to deny it."

Joe took a deep breath. His eyes flashed fire, and almost unconsciously the real estate dealer retreated.

"Mr. Bemis, I never stole a thing in my life, and you are the first person to say such a thing."

"Well, I can't help it, I've——"

"Yes, you can help it. You have got to take it back; do you understand?"

"Ha! you threaten me?" howled the man in amazement.

"I certainly do. I won't stand being called a thief by anyone."

There was a murmur among those who were listening with bated breath to what was being said. Joe's way had won most of them over to his side.

"I want my pocketbook," said Amos Bemis doggedly.

"I suppose you do; but I haven't got it."

"Then what have you done with it?"

Again Joe's eyes flashed fire. A new feeling, way down in his heart, was struggling to the surface.

"Mr. Bemis, are you quite sure you had a pocketbook in the desk?"

"What! what! do you think——"

"Please answer the question?"

"Of course I had my pocketbook there. I am not a fool."

"Are you sure it was there when you left the shop in my charge?"

"Yes, I am."

"And it was not there when you got back?"

"It wasn't there when I looked a couple of hours ago."

"Then how do you know I took it? I haven't been near your store since you discharged me."

"Nobody else could have taken it. Nobody knew it was there but you."

"I didn't know it was there."

"I reckon you did."

"I never opened that desk to see what you had in it. If you really had a pocketbook in it, and it was stolen, somebody else did it."

"Tut, tut! Joe, you have that pocketbook and unless you turn it over without more talk I'll have you locked up."

Joe grew pale. He was in a serious situation, and did not know which way best to turn.

"I haven't the pocketbook."

He had hardly spoken, when Amos Bemis again caught him by the arm.

With a subdued cry the boy flung him off, and pushed him against the counter.

"Let go of me, Amos Bemis."

"What! what! you won't be arrested, eh? We'll see about that! Somebody call Constable Hicks."

A small boy who was at hand needed no second bidding. As fast as he could travel he made his way to the tavern, where the town constable was quietly dozing in a chair.

"Come, Mr. Hicks, there's a thief to arrest! Come quick!"

The constable at once sprang up and started out, followed by a crowd of loungers, all anxious for a bit of excitement.

Hicks soon reached the store, and found Amos Be-

mis at the door, while Joe stood facing him with arms folded.

"What's wanted here?" demanded the Mountainville guardian of the peace.

"Arrest that boy, Hicks!" shouted Amos Bemis, "and be sure that he don't get away from you."

"What's the row?"

"He is a thief."

"That is not true, Mr. Hicks," interrupted Joe.

"I say it is. I want him taken before Judge Ullman this very night."

"You'll have to go, Joe," said the constable, who, by the way, knew the boy fairly well.

"But I didn't take the pocketbook, Mr. Hicks."

"I can't help it. I've got to do my duty. Come along, and if you give me your word that you won't run for it, I won't handcuff you."

"Don't trust him, Hicks," put in Amos Bemis. "He's a sly fellow——"

"I know my duty," returned the constable, curtly.

"What do you say, Joe?"

"I won't run away, Mr. Hicks."

"All right, then; come on."

Side by side they left the store, closely followed by Amos Bemis and the crowd of onlookers.

The residence of Judge Ullman was not far distant. In the wing of the house was situated this gentleman's

law office and court-room, and to this Hicks directed his steps.

The judge, or, more properly perhaps, squire, although he was invariably addressed as judge, was a short, fat man, with a rather jolly cast of countenance. He was reading a book when his visitors appeared, and looked up in surprise.

"Hullo! what's this?"

"I have had Hicks bring a felonious felon to you," said Amos Bemis. "There he stands, Judge."

"Who is it?"

"Joe Hurley, your honor, a boy I took in and gave work when he was 'most starving. I gave him a good job, and treated him like my own, and in return he has shown his gratitude by robbing me. Yes, sir, he actually stole my pocketbook, the one I left in the desk."

"Dear! You don't say so! That's bad! I didn't think it of John Hurley's son."

"Judge Ullman, I am innocent," cried Joe, somewhat desperately. "I know nothing of the pocket-book."

"He does, he does!" exclaimed Amos Bemis. "He is a felonious felon, Judge."

"Please tell me your story, Amos," replied Judge Ullman, quietly. "Gentlemen, sit down and keep quiet," this last to the crowd, that at once obeyed.

In a rambling fashion Amos Bemis told his story,

how he had had a pocketbook with just an even fifty dollars in it in the desk, and how he had discovered that it was missing.

"But how do you come to accuse Joe Hurley?"

"Why, because he took it! Who else could have done it, Judge? I was the only person in the back apartment, and I didn't steal my own pocketbook. Besides, the young villain had got a grudge against me because I discharged him."

"I have no grudge against you," said Joe.

"I say you have. You are a miserable thief, and——"

"Gently, Amos," interrupted Judge Ullman. "He is not a thief until the charge is proven—that is, in the eyes of the Court."

"But I want him locked up."

"I will have to hear his story, first."

"He'll tell you a pack of lies, Judge, I'm certain he will."

"Tell me what you know of this," said Judge Ullman, ignoring Amos Bemis, and turning to Joe.

"I know nothing whatever. I never saw the pocketbook that he says was in the desk. If it was stolen somebody else took it. For all I know, the pocketbook was never there."

"How dare you?" shrieked the stationer. "I'll shake you well for that, you miserable——"

"Silence!" thundered Judge Ullman.

"But, Judge——"

"Silence, I say. You have accused young Hurley, and now he has a perfect right to defend himself."

"He is mad at me, because I won't come back and work for him," went on Joe. "He discharged me while he was in a temper, and then wanted me back. But I've found a better job with a man who will treat me decently, and——"

"I treated you better than you deserved," growled Amos Bemis, upon whose forehead the heavy beads of perspiration were standing.

"Now he wants to get me into trouble," continued Joe. "He is a mean man, the meanest in Mountainville, and lots of folks in this room know it."

"That's so," came a voice from the rear.

"He is a mean man," put in a second voice.

"Silence! silence! or I will have the court-room cleared," thundered Judge Ullman.

"I didn't take the pocketbook, and he can't prove that I did."

"Amos Bemis, can you prove that he took the pocketbook?"

"N—no; but I know he did," faltered the stationer. "Judge, I want him held until we can search his house and get proof against him."

A long talk followed, and finally the judge had to grant Amos Bemis' request that Joe be arrested.

"Joe, can you furnish bail?" asked Judge Ullman, in rather a kindly voice.

"How much bail, sir?"

"Five hundred dollars?"

Joe's heart sank. He knew of no one who would go on a bond for that amount.

"I'm—I'm afraid not," he said, falteringly.

"Then I'll have to commit you for the present until a further investigation can be made."

"I will go his bail," said a voice from the rear of the court-room, and Ralph Lumley strode forward.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE COAL ROAD GULLY

JOE was as fully astonished as the others in the courtroom. He sprang forward, and as the surveyor came to the front he grasped his employer's hand.

"Oh, sir, will you really do this for me?" he cried.

"Yes, willingly."

"Then you believe me?"

"I do, my boy, otherwise I would not do this much for you."

"I will never forget your kindness, Mr. Lumley, and you can be sure I will not run away."

"No; you don't look like a boy to run away."

"Maybe you ain't worth the amount of bail," put in Amos Bemis, who did not appear to relish the turn affairs had taken.

"You ought to know better than that, Mr. Bemis," said the surveyor.

"Me! I don't know you."

"Do not remember me, you mean. I am Ralph Lumley, formerly of the firm of Dashwell & Lumley, of Philadelphia."

Amos Bemis fell back and his face grew a trifle paler than usual.

"What—what are you doing here?" he asked, slowly.

"That is my business."

"You will lose on that boy. He'll run away, and you'll be out your five hundred dollars."

"Let me be the judge of my own actions, Bemis. That boy just about saved my life yesterday, and I am not one to forget such a service."

"Saved your life?" cried the judge.

"Yes. I was beset by two villainous tramps on a mountain road, and he came to my aid and helped rout them. He is a brave boy."

The judge nodded. Then a low conversation ensued between him and the surveyor, after which a certain paper was drawn up and signed.

Then Judge Ullman turned to Joe.

"Well, Joe, you are now free, but you must appear at this court-room promptly one week from to-morrow morning."

"Thank you sir," returned the boy. "I won't fail to be on hand."

He turned to thank Ralph Lumley for what he had done, when Meg burst through the crowd of men, and rushed into his arms.

"Oh, Joe, you are not arrested!" cried the girl with a sob.

"I am out on bail, thanks to Mr. Lumley, here," returned the boy. "He has been a great friend to me."

Meg bowed shyly to the surveyor, who took her hand; and all three passed from the court-room.

Amos Bemis at once got a search warrant, and Hicks went with it to search the Hurley cottage.

Of course, nothing was found, and finally the constable withdrew, and he and Amos Bemis went to the latter's store to search for some trace of the thief.

Ralph Lumley accompanied Joe and Meg to their home, and was introduced to Mr. Hurley, who that evening was feeling better than usual. He proved a most pleasant companion, and seemed to like it at the cottage.

"Do you wish to take a boarder?" he asked of Meg.

"A boarder?" she questioned, doubtfully.

"Yes. I do not like it at the tavern, and would be willing to pay for a room here instead, if you could let me have it."

The matter was talked over, and finally it was agreed that Mr. Lumley should have the large bedroom over the sitting-room, with breakfast, a put-up lunch, and dinner at night, for seven dollars a week as long as he remained in the vicinity. Meg wanted to charge but five, but the surveyor insisted that it was worth seven, and said he would pay that or he would not come.

Mr. Hurley was delighted at the addition to the family, as he put it, and as he found the surveyor well

acquainted with the coal and oil regions, the two soon became deeply interested in conversation bearing on these matters.

On the following morning Joe and his employer started off as before. They did not have much to do in the line of surveying, and by noon Ralph Lumley announced the work for the day over.

"I will go to the house and draw up a map," he said. "You may do what you please in the meantime."

Joe thought this a good opportunity to visit the gully up the Coal Road, and, as soon as lunch was over, he hurried off.

When he reached the lower end of the gully proper all seemed deserted save by the birds and numerous insects that kept up a ceaseless whistling and cricking.

Making a detour around the spot in order to ascertain that no tramps were hidden behind the bushes, the boy began slowly to lower himself down the north side of the gully, that being more sloping and thicker with bushes than the other.

He was making his way with great caution, and had lowered himself nearly half the distance to the bottom, when a bush to which he was clinging gave way unexpectedly.

Joe went down to the bottom of the gully heels over head, and on top of him followed a great mass of dirt, stones, and brush.

The boy gave a loud cry as he went down, a cry that

was cut short when some of the dirt entered his mouth.

Joe received a severe shaking up, and one of his hands was badly scratched, but that was all. He soon picked himself up again, and brushing off his clothing, began his search for the long-lost blue tin box.

The gully was thick with rank weeds and brush, while scattered through it were numerous large rocks. Besides this, a tiny stream wandered along in a serpentine fashion, almost hidden by leaves and grass, and into which Joe plunged more than once.

"This is about as lonely a place as a fellow would care to strike," Joe murmured to himself, as he peered into first one nook and then another.

A half hour went by, and still he had found nothing of note. Once he saw the end of something shiny sticking from behind a rock, but it proved to be nothing more valuable than an old tin can.

At length Joe found himself about halfway down the gully. Here he paused to straighten up, for the constant bending over had made his back ache.

"It looks like a useless task," he thought, "but I'll not give up until I've gone over the entire ground, not once, but a number of times, as I promised father."

He again moved forward. Hardly had he taken a dozen steps when the murmur of voices broke upon his ears.

"Say, Sam, don't keep the bottle to yourself; hand it over."

"That's all right, Doc Olney; you've had your full share of this," returned a second voice.

Joe came to a sudden halt. The voice sounded from some place to his right, and, looking in that direction, he saw seated behind a big rock the two men who had attacked Ralph Lumley on the Coal Road.

Fortunately the backs of both men were turned toward the boy, and neither saw him. Joe hardly dared to breathe as he stole behind a big bush not far away.

Following the words, Joe saw a bottle passed from one of the men to the other.

"That's prime stuff."

"The best in Iron-ton," said Sam Ridd, for such was the name of one of the roughs.

"And he never knew you took it," chuckled Doc Olney.

"He never did. But I say, are you going to tackle that surveyor again?"

"Certainly."

"We made a mess of it before."

"We'd been all right if it hadn't been for that boy," muttered Olney, savagely.

"Who was he?"

"I don't know."

More drinking ensued. Joe was greatly surprised

at what he had heard. These two roughs had attacked Ralph Lumley with a purpose, and now intended to try the dastardly deed again.

What could they have against the surveyor?

"If I thought they would let the secret out I would remain and listen to their talk," he reasoned, thinking himself justified under the circumstances to play the eavesdropper.

"Yes, we've got to finish this job," said Olney, after a pause. "I promised Bart Pangler that we would do it."

Joe was now amazed. Bart Pangler had hired these two men, or at least Olney, to attack Ralph Lumley, and Bart Pangler was the very man who had swindled Joe's father.

## CHAPTER IX

### JOE IN A SERIOUS SITUATION

ALL thoughts of leaving the place for the present vanished from Joe's mind. He must remain by all means and listen to every word these two men might chance to utter.

"Who knows but that I shall discover something to father's interest?" reasoned Joe to himself.

And hardly daring to breathe, he crept closer, so that not a word of what might follow should escape him.

"Where did you meet Pangler?" asked Sam Ridd.

"In Philadelphia, at Oakley's."

"Was he hard up?"

"Hard up?" Olney gave a short, rough laugh.

"I rather guess not, Sam."

"Then he must have promised you a neat bit for this work."

"He'll give us a hundred each."

"And how much for the papers."

"Another hundred."

"The job is worth more. Did he make anything out of that oil deal?"

"What oil deal?"

"You know well enough."

"No, I don't."

"That oil deal that fellow named Hurley was interested in."

"I don't know."

Here was more news to Joe. The two were evidently speaking of his father. What could they mean by the oil deal? Did they refer to the property the deed for which was in the blue tin box?

"I'll make it my business to find out before I am many days older," said Joe to himself, with sudden determination. "Even if I have to have these two rascals arrested."

"He's a shrewd feller, Bart Pangler is," went on Sam Ridd, musingly. "Anybody that takes him for a fool gits left every time."

"That's so. Got a match?"

Sam Ridd handed over the article called for, and Olney drew from his pocket a short briar-root pipe, filled and lit it.

Ridd followed suit, and it was several minutes before the two began their conversation again.

During this time Joe looked around on the other side of the big rock, and was surprised to find that the pair had built a lean-to against the south wall of the gully. It was composed of branches of trees covered with brush, and looked quite cozy. Evidently they were using it to sleep in at night.

"Yes, Pangler has been mighty lucky, too," said Olney. "He's made money, but how? Now, if you or I——"

"Reckon we ain't got the brains," laughed Ridd. "But I say, can't we squeeze him for more?"

Olney closed one eye suggestively.

"That's what I'm calculating to do, Sam."

"Good! Now if—gee gopher!"

Sam Ridd sprang to his feet in alarm, for a big black spider had dropped from the rock directly upon his face.

As he sprang up Joe started back, thinking that perhaps he had been discovered.

He stumbled over a dead tree, and went down with a crash into the brush.

At this Olney sprang up.

"What was that?" he exclaimed.

"I don't know," returned Ridd. "Confound those spiders!"

"There is somebody spying on us!" shouted his companion. "I'm going to find out who it is."

"I'm with you."

Both men ran round to where Joe had been in hiding. They were just in time to see the boy making off down the gully.

"If it ain't that boy that helped Lumley," cried Olney, in amazement. "Hi! stop there!"

But Joe had no thought of stopping. As soon as he

could he had picked himself up, and now he realized that the best he could do was to put the greatest possible distance between himself and the two rascals whose conversation he had overheard.

With flying steps he bounded down the gully, leaping over this rock and that, and crashing straight ahead through the bushes and the tangled undergrowth.

As soon as they could recover from their astonishment both Ridd and Olney started in pursuit.

Both of the men were good runners, and it was not long before the gap which had at first separated Joe and the men began to grow shorter.

Seeing this, Joe essayed to find some hiding place. But in this he was disappointed.

A few minutes more and the two rascals would have him in their clutches.

He was approaching a section of the gully where both of the sides were almost perpendicular. Looking up to the top, twenty feet above his head, Joe saw that to scale those walls would be almost, if not quite, impossible.

Yet he determined to make one last attempt to get beyond the reach of his enemies.

To one side a number of vines and small bushes clung in a loose fashion. Springing up as high as possible, Joe caught hold of these and did what he could to draw himself up out of the reach of Ridd and Olney.

"Stop! stop!" shouted Ridd, as soon as he saw this new move.

To this command Joe paid no attention.

"If you don't stop I'll shoot you!" added Olney.

Joe shivered at this. He had no desire to be shot, and he felt that the villain was bad enough to fire upon him should he choose to do so.

But a hurried glance down showed him that Olney was merely trying to scare him, for no pistol or firearm of any description was in sight.

"Do you hear me?" howled the ruffian, loudly.

Still Joe did not reply. He had gained a distance of eight or ten feet and the top of the gully was now but a couple of yards above him.

"Let us go up after him, Sam!" roared Olney.

"I ain't much on the climb," returned the other ruffian. "But maybe I can haul him down."

With a movement that was decidedly clumsy, Sam Ridd jumped up and caught hold of the lower vines, which a few seconds before had supported Joe's weight. They cracked and tore away from the rocks, and caused him to give a short snort of alarm.

"They won't hold me, Doc."

"Yes, they will," shouted Olney. "Quick, or the boy will be up to the top and away. I'll help you up."

"But they're breaking already."

"Never mind, I'll catch you if you tumble."

Acting on Olney's promise, Sam Ridd pulled himself

up a bit higher, and then gained a hold in a crack of the rocky wall. Olney was close behind him.

Ridd was now within a yard of Joe's feet, and thus encouraged, he made another attempt to gain upon the boy, who at that instant moved upward a few inches.

"You've got him! he can't go no higher!" sung out Olney. "Hurry up and grab him by the feet."

With renewed vigor Joe tried to gain the top of the gully, now so close at hand.

But now Sam Ridd made another move upward, followed by Olney, and suddenly Joe felt a hand grasp him around the right ankle.

"Let go of me!" he cried.

"Not much. Come down here."

"Let go, I say!"

Suddenly lowering himself a bit, Joe kicked out vigorously, and the ruffian caught a blow which caused him to come down with a crash on the top of his companion.

Both rolled over into the bushes and the water of the stream, which at this point, owing to the narrowness of the gully, was nearly two feet deep.

They picked themselves up as quickly as possible. Sam Ridd groaned dismally, and declared that his shoulder was broken.

"You go after him," he said to Olney. "Go on; I've had enough."

Olney looked up. Joe was still in sight, but just on

the point of drawing himself to the top and out of danger.

"I'll fix him," muttered the ruffian. "I was always good on the throw."

He picked up a large stone, and, taking careful aim, threw it with all force at Joe's back.

## CHAPTER X

### JOE IS CAPTURED

HAD the rock which Olney threw at Joe reached its mark, it would have caused the boy a serious injury.

But luckily the missile merely grazed Joe's side, doing no further damage than to give him a scare.

"I must waste no time in getting to the top," he muttered to himself, and even as the words were on his lips up came another stone, this time close beside his head.

At last Joe managed to grasp the top of the bluff he was scaling. In another moment he had drawn himself up and out of sight of the two ruffians below.

He could hear them shouting after him, but to this he paid no heed, his one thought being to get as far as possible away from the spot.

The distance to the Coal Road was not great, but it was through a patch of uneven ground thickly overgrown with rank vegetation, and Joe made but slow progress.

"It's too bad they went down there," he thought, as he fought his way along. "It seems as if I am never to have a chance of searching for the blue tin box."

Yet Joe's mind was filled with thoughts of what he

had overheard the two ruffians say. He was much mystified, and he resolved to tell Mr. Lumley and his father all at the first opportunity.

"Perhaps father will know who the men are, now that it is known they are tools of Bart Pangler," he reasoned.

Then Joe came to a dead halt, as a sudden idea flashed into his mind. Was it possible that Bart Pangler had sent those two men in the neighborhood of the gully to search for the missing box?

"To be sure! that may be so!" cried the boy to himself. "He wouldn't dare to come himself. Perhaps they've got the box already."

This thought gave Joe a chill, and for the moment he was on the point of retracing his steps, intending to spy upon Sam Ridd and Doc Olney, and ascertain, if possible, the facts in the case. But at last he gave up the idea.

"If they saw me they would do their best to capture me, and I don't want another such time as I've had. No; I'll tell father, and perhaps Mr. Lumley will get help and come back with me."

It was growing dark in the shadow of the mountains by the time the Coal Road was reached. But the struggle through the dense undergrowth had so tired Joe that he could not resist the temptation to sit down on a smooth rock and rest.

While doing this he strained his ears in the direction

from which he had come to learn if he was being pursued. But besides the chirping of the birds, and the ceaseless humming of insects, all was as silent as a graveyard.

"I reckon they've given it up," was Joe's mental comment. "They couldn't climb the side of the gully, and it was too far to go back to the other end. Now, if I hurry, perhaps we can get back and capture them before they have a chance to leave the neighborhood."

With this thought, Joe arose and started for Mountainville. He knew every foot of the Coal Road, and the increasing darkness did not bother him.

But just before reaching the Ironton turnpike something came to his sight which caused him to utter a cry of astonishment.

There, right ahead of him, were Sam Ridd and Doc Olney.

How the two ruffians had reached the spot so quickly was a conundrum to Joe, but just now he had no time to attempt its solution.

He stopped short, and attempted to turn back, but ere he could do so Ridd caught sight of him.

"There he is, Doc."

"Where?" cried Olney, wheeling about.

"Just up the road. See him running?"

"Are you sure it's the boy?"

"Dead certain."

Olney said no more, but started after Joe on a lively run, quickly followed by his companion.

Joe knew not in what direction to go, but took the back path up the Coal Road, running at the top of his speed.

But he soon found that it was all he could do to keep ahead of Olney, whose legs were long and nimble. The ruffian began gradually to close the gap between them, and, with a sinking heart, Joe realized that it was only a question of a few moments when he would be captured.

He knew that it would not do to remain in the well-worn path any longer, and at the first favorable spot sprang aside across a brook and plunged into the bushes.

Doc Olney was close enough behind to perceive the movement. He shouted back to Ridd, and then followed across the stream.

All was now dark around Joe. Underfoot it was damp and uncertain, and he could not see ten paces ahead of him.

He kept on, and at the first chance made a sharp turn to the left. He wished to throw Olney off the track, and in this he was partly successful. He heard the ruffian pause, and then walk around in a circle, and finally shout to Ridd.

"Where is he?" questioned Ridd, when he came up.

"He ain't far. I tracked him to here," replied Olney.

"Why don't you go on ahead, then?"

"Because I'm satisfied that he turned off either to the right or the left."

"Humph! Then supposing we separate. You go north, and I'll go south."

"That is what I was going to suggest. If you catch sight of him, yell."

With these words the two rascals parted, and a moment later Joe heard Ridd coming toward him.

The boy would have pushed on, but immediately in front of him was a large pool of water, and beyond some boggy land, and how treacherous the latter might prove to be there was no telling.

Joe looked around, and to his left discovered a stout tree, which bent over the pool.

Without hesitation he caught the lower branches of this tree, and swung himself up, out of sight.

He was none too soon. Hardly had the rustling of the leaves ceased when Sam Ridd entered the small opening in front of the pool.

"Hullo!" Joe heard him mutter. "Wonder if the boy went through that?"

He came to a halt, and, peering down, Joe saw him begin a minute investigation of the ground around the bottom of the tree.

A moment of intense suspense on the boy's part followed, which was ended when Ridd straightened up, and shouted:

"Come down out of that, you young rascal!"

To this cry Joe made no answer, although his heart seemed to be in his throat.

"Do you hear?" went on Ridd. "You can't fool me; I know you are up there."

Still Joe did not reply. Then the ruffian yelled for Olney, and presently both stood beneath the tree.

"He's up there," Ridd said to his companion. "See the marks of his feet?"

"I'll soon have him down, if he is," returned Olney, savagely. "He ain't going to get away now we've had so much trouble with him."

He began to climb the tree in somewhat clumsy manner. Joe saw that there was no escape on any side, nor above. Perhaps he had better drop.

And drop he did, waiting until Olney was close at hand. He landed directly on Ridd's head, and together they rolled on the soft ground.

"You rascal!" roared the ruffian. "I'll fix ye for that!"

Joe tried to spring to his feet, but Ridd held him fast, and a bitter hand-to-hand struggle ensued.

Joe was getting somewhat the better of it, when Olney came sliding down the tree. He at once leaped to his companion's assistance, and between them Joe was soon brought to submission.

"Now we'll see how matters stand!" growled Olney.

"Just you march back to the gully, and don't you attempt any more tricks on us."

"March back to the gully?" repeated Joe, who had thought that the ruffians wanted merely to do him bodily harm.

"That's what I said."

"But what for?"

"That's our business, sonny. Come, get a move on you."

"Supposing I won't go?"

"Then we'll find a way to make you."

Olney's tone was so fierce and suggestive that Joe said no more. He turned and walked back with the two men, one on either side of him.

By the time the gully was reached it was quite dark. The men watched Joe as a cat watches a mouse while they were descending. When the lean-to was reached Ridd went inside and brought forth a clothes-line.

"That's right," said Olney. "Bind him, and see that you make a good job of it."

Ridd at once went to work. First, he bound Joe's hands behind him, and then backing the boy to a peculiar jutting rock, he fastened the end of the rope to this.

"Now I reckon he'll stay there as long as the rock does," he grinned.

"Well, he can, for all I care," growled Olney. "Come, light the lantern."

## CHAPTER XI

### MIDNIGHT VISITORS

JOE listened to Olney's words with a sinking heart. Evidently the ruffian was a merciless wretch, who would hesitate at nothing.

"Tell me why you have brought me here?" he cried. "I have done nothing to you."

"Do you call that row on the road nothing?" demanded Ridd, who was binding up several cuts on his hands.

"Do you mean when you attacked Mr. Lumley?"

"Of course I do."

"But you had no right to attack him."

"That was our affair. What right had you to jump in, I'd like to know?"

"I wasn't going to see him killed," burst out Joe.

"We wouldn't have killed him. We only wanted——"

Ridd broke off short as a warning glance from Olney caught his eye. He began to fill his pipe, and was soon puffing away in silence.

"There's another thing," said Olney, presently, as he, too, began to smoke. "What were you doing down here in the gully a while ago?"

"What is that to you?"

"You were spying on us."

"I came on you quite unexpectedly," replied Joe, that being the best answer he could make.

"Humph!" sneered Ridd. "Of course he was spyin' on us. The question is how much did he hear?"

The changing look on Olney's face showed that he was disturbed. He took a turn or two before the lean-to, and then faced Joe.

"I want you to tell us all you know," he said, sharply.

"I know you are a pair of rascals, and have no right to keep me here," burst out the boy. "If you want to rob me, why don't you do so?"

"By the boots! I didn't think of that!" shouted Ridd, and he at once came up close and began to go through Joe's pockets.

He found very little of value outside of fifty cents in change—a sum he transferred to his own pocket, with a wink at Olney.

By his action one thing went in Joe's favor. Olney forgot for the moment the question he had asked and turned to his companion.

"Sam, there are times when you are a first-class fool," he said, with much earnestness. "What's the good of robbing the boy of half a dollar?"

"It's as good in my pocket as his," returned Ridd, coolly.

"Well, you'd stop to catch minnows when you might

catch bass," grumbled Olney. "We haven't much time to spare."

He pulled out his watch—he carried a fine gold one, Joe noticed—and held it close to the lantern.

"Quarter to six. We'll have to be starting soon."

"Bound to make it to-night, then?" observed Ridd.

"Yes, why not?"

"But the boy?"

"Can stay right where he is."

"Will you come back for him?"

"That depends on circumstances. We may have a harder time than we think."

"Supposing we don't come back?"

Olney gave a hard, cruel laugh.

"Then he can take care of himself."

"Do you intend to leave me here alone?" questioned Joe, with a shiver he could not suppress.

"That's about the size of it," replied Olney.

Joe said no more, but the white look on his face showed that he felt far from easy over the outcome of this strange adventure.

Ridd and Olney began to converse in a low tone outside of the lean-to. Joe tried his best to hear what passed between them, but only a few stray words were caught by him, and these gave no clew to the drift of the talk.

At last, about seven o'clock, Olney came into the lean-to and picked up the lantern.

"Now mind how you behave yourself while we are gone," he said. "Don't you dare to make any attempt to escape until to-morrow morning."

"Then you are going to leave me alone?"

"Yes."

"Give me a drink of water before you go, please."

Olney hesitated, and then going to the stream, filled an old tin can and brought it back. He held it so that Joe might drink his fill, and then threw the can away.

"Now, mind yourself," he said. "Come on, Sam."

"I'm all ready."

"Got the bag?"

"Yes."

Without further words the two ruffians passed from the lean-to and hurried along the gully to where an easy path led to the Ironton turnpike.

"I'll bet he makes an effort to get away," observed Olney, as they walked along.

"Of course he will, but he won't make it," returned Sam Ridd. "I know how to tie a rope, I do."

"You made a mistake in taking away the boy's money."

"How so?"

"He knows you are a thief now."

"I don't care. He may know more when he gets loose, if he ever does."

And the speaker chuckled.

"That's all right, Sam, but you don't want to go too fast. Hush! hold up!"

The sound of carriage wheels had reached Olney's ears. He drew back in the shadow of some large bushes, and pulled Ridd after him.

Presently the vehicle came into view. It was a buggy containing two men, and soon flashed out of sight.

"We don't want to be seen no more than we can help," observed Olney, as they continued their journey. "We've been seen too much in this region already."

"Well, we'll leave for good after this night's work," said his companion. "My, but I'm hungry!"

"So am I, but we can't stop to eat till after this job is done."

"I reckon not, but a sandwich would go mighty fine just now."

On and on they trudged, until the outskirts of Mountainville were reached.

"It's mighty dark for this time of night," observed Ridd. "I'm blessed if I don't think we're going to have a storm."

"So we are."

"Then we can't do anything."

"We must do that job to-night," replied Olney, firmly. "We ought to have tackled it in the right way before. But now he has left the tavern, I'm hoping it will be an easy matter."

"It's funny he went to board at John Hurley's, ain't

it? We can now kill two birds with one stone, as the saying is."

"We can if we go at this right. But don't make any more blunders."

Instead of passing the tavern, the two men took a small side path and crossed several fields. They appeared to know the locality well, and ten minutes' time brought them directly opposite the Hurley cottage.

There was a light in the kitchen, but otherwise the abode was dark.

"I'll take a peep in through the window," suggested Olney. "Give me the signal if you see anyone coming."

He crossed the road, and entered the little door-yard. A few cautious steps took him to the window, the curtain of which was but partly drawn.

Meg sat in a rocker darning Joe's socks. No one else was in the kitchen.

Satisfied on the latter point, Olney made a tour around the cottage, looking in at every window which offered the chance. Then, as silently as a shadow, he recrossed the road and joined his companion.

"Only the gal around, as far as I can see."

"Where is Ralph Lumley?"

"Asleep, most likely. I know that he goes to bed early so that he won't oversleep himself in the morning."

"But John Hurley must be somewhere."

"Oh, he don't count."

"Well, what next?"

"The gal is most likely sitting up for her brother. I propose to get her out of the house."

"How?"

"Lay back and I'll show you."

Olney pulled a false beard from his pocket and adjusted it. Then he put on a pair of glasses. Going to the kitchen door, he knocked softly. There was a stir within, and then Meg answered his summons.

"I'm lookin' for Miss Meg Hurley," began Olney, in an uncertain voice.

"I am Meg Hurley," replied the girl. "What do you want of me?"

"Your brother sent me."

"Joe?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"What is it you wish?"

"He wants me to bring the big ax to him—the one in the back shed."

"The ax in the back shed?"

"Yes, ma'am. Some old building has tumbled down, and he wants to help get out a couple of men that are held down by the timbers. Will you show me where the woodshed is?"

"Certainly. Come on."

Wondering what could be the matter, and never suspecting any trick, Meg left the house and ran toward

the woodshed, which Olney had noticed was fully a hundred feet down the rather long garden.

It was quite dark, but Meg knew where Joe kept the big ax quite well, and she entered the woodshed without hesitation.

Hardly had she done so, when Olney closed the door and bolted it upon her.

"Sam," he cried, softly.

"Here I am."

"Keep her quiet for a few minutes while I go to the house."

"All right."

"Let me out!" called Meg, in alarm. "What does this mean?"

She caught hold of the door, and tried to force it open. But the bolt, although only of wood, held, and she remained a prisoner.

"It's all right, miss," said Sam, in a soothing tone. "I wonder what makes the door stick so?"

He began to fumble at the door, making an apparent effort to open it. In this way several minutes were consumed.

"You have fastened that door on purpose," burst out Meg, and she began to scream.

"Shut up!" growled Sam Ridd. "Shut up, or I won't let you out at all. You won't be hurt if you'll only keep quiet."

"But what does it mean?"

"Never mind."

The storm that had been mentioned was now approaching, and the rumble of thunder could be distinctly heard. More and more frightened, Meg cried louder than ever, but unluckily her voice did not reach the cottage, where her father and Ralph Lumley were sleeping all unconsciously of what was happening.

In the meantime Olney had reached the kitchen again. His first movement was to turn down the light. Then he slipped off his shoes, and stuck each in a separate pocket.

An inclosed staircase was close at hand, and up this he made his way, moving as silently, as a ghost might have done.

In a back room he heard the heavy breathing of John Hurley, telling that the sick man lay fast in the land of dreams.

He passed beyond this room, and entered the next. A faint sound came from the bed in the corner.

In a moment he had brought forth a dark lantern from beneath his coat. Its rays flashed around the room, and rested on a case on the bureau.

"That's what I want," he muttered to himself, as he walked over and secured it.

Hardly had his fingers closed on the case when there was a leap from the bed, and Ralph Lumley confronted the robber.

## CHAPTER XII

### HOW JOE FARED

WHEN Sam Ridd and Doc Olney departed from the lean-to they took the light with them, and soon the place became as dark as the proverbial pitch. Joe heard their footsteps growing fainter and fainter, and it was not long before they died out altogether, and he realized that he had really been left utterly alone.

The boy was in a piteous frame of mind. He wished to cry out, but did not know if such a course would be best. It might bring back the ruffians, and then matters would undoubtedly go hard with him.

While in the darkness he endeavored to free himself from his bonds. He tugged and pulled as he had never done before, and the line sunk deep into his flesh.

But it was all to no purpose. Ridd had done his work well, and the line refused to break. At last, in despair, Joe gave up the struggle.

Quarter of an hour went by. It seemed an age to Joe. All remained as silent as before, and not a single ray of light penetrated into the lean-to, although Joe felt almost sure the moon was shining.

"I wonder what Meg and father will think when I don't come home?" he thought. "I'm sure Meg will be greatly worried."

Presently Joe fancied he heard a rustling outside. Thinking that somebody was coming, he fairly held his breath in anticipation.

But it was only the wind coming up the gully—something quite common in that district.

Finally Joe could stand it no longer to remain silent, and, filling his lungs, he shouted, not once, but many times.

His voice, otherwise strong, sounded muffled in the cramped quarters of the lean-to, and he was quite certain that it could not be heard one-half of the distance to the Coal Road.

"It's no use," he thought, dismally. "No one will hear me, and I might as well save my breath."

Still he kept on shouting, until his voice grew husky and lost much of its strength.

Presently the wind which came up the gully increased in force. Joe could feel it strike the lean-to and make the frail structure quiver.

"Maybe we'll have a storm," he said to himself. "It looked a good deal that way this afternoon."

As the minutes dragged by the wind blew stronger and stronger, and presently Joe fancied he heard the patter of rain on the sloping sides of his prison.

Then from beyond the mountain came a low rumble

of thunder. Soon followed a flash of lightning, and then another rumble, much louder than the first.

A storm was coming, that was certain, but how hard it would be remained to be seen.

"I hope it doesn't bring much rain," was Joe's thought. "For if it does, and the brook just outside should rise, I might drown like a rat in a trap."

Joe well knew that a heavy rainfall invariably swelled the tiny stream in the gully into a perfect torrent, the water from the mountain sides finding a cramped outlet through the gorge near where the boy had scaled the bluff.

Again and again came the flashes of lightning and roll of thunder, and the wind increased steadily, until it seemed to be blowing little short of a hurricane.

Once more Joe tugged at his bonds. Alas! he might as well have strained at handcuffs of steel. The strong line only cut deeper, until the blood ran over his hands, and he was compelled to cry out with pain.

Overhead the trees which lined the gully creaked and swished in the wind, and soon came a steady downpour of rain. It entered the lean-to at all points, and inside of half an hour poor Joe was soaked to the skin.

"I'll be drowned like a rat, and no mistake," he said to himself, with a shiver. "Oh, but this is awful! I would give all my earnings for the next year or two to be out of it."

The rain continued to come down steadily. It was a

cold rain, and down there in the gully it caused Joe's teeth to chatter.

And now the youth noticed something that sent a chill straight to the bottom of his heart.

The stream was rising.

Already it had reached the floor of the lean-to.

Ten minutes passed and the water was up to his feet, another ten minutes and it reached to his ankles.

In sheer desperation Joe cried frantically for help. But the roaring wind drowned out his voice completely.

"It isn't any use," he muttered. "I shall die if this storm keeps up. If only——"

A crash of thunder directly overhead cut short his remarks. The lean-to was filled with a sulphurous smoke.

Then came a crash of another nature. A tree on the brink of the gully had been struck by lightning.

The tree had stood almost directly over the lean-to, and now its massive trunk came crashing down, smashing the shelter flat, and burying Joe beneath the ruins.

## CHAPTER XIII

### A STRUGGLE IN THE GULLY

To one looking from the outside it would seem that poor Joe must have been instantly killed when the tree was hurled from its rooting on the brink of the gully and came crashing down on the top of the lean-to.

That frail structure went down as if built of cardboard, the logs and branches which composed it scattering in all directions.

But as has been said, the boy was bound to the rocks on the side of the structure next to the wall of the gully, and it was this which saved him from a cruel death.

As the great tree came down its topmost branches struck away from the wall, and its lower end did not come down as far as Joe's head, but remained against the rocks a yard or so above.

The branches and logs, however, of the lean-to came down on Joe, knocking the breath from his body and pinning him against the great rock to which he was bound.

He gave a cry of horror, which was drowned in the roaring of the elements without, and then struggled to push away from him the logs which were squeezing out his life.

All about him was pitch dark, excepting when a vivid flash of lightning lit up the scene.

"It looks like my last hour," he groaned to himself. "The wretches, to leave me in such a situation as this!"

The rain still fell in torrents and the brook was steadily rising. Joe could feel the water up to his knees and soon it was up to his waist.

He kept on working at the logs which held him, straining every muscle to slide them off into the current.

At last his efforts were so far successful that two of the logs floated away, and then the boy breathed easier.

Another big log pressed against his shoulder, a long log which was flattened on two sides.

Joe was about to push this away, when an idea struck him. Perhaps it might be as well to cling to this log in case the water in the gully rose any higher.

The stream was now nearly to his armpits, and poor Joe shivered greatly from the cold, for the water from the mountain side was far from warm.

Soon came another clap of thunder, followed almost immediately by a greater downpour than any which had gone before.

The water began to rise rapidly. It reached Joe's arms—his shoulders—his chin.

He gave a despairing shout, and putting out both feet placed them around the log, which now showed signs of floating away.

Then came an overwhelming rush of water and the log went up like a cork. Joe's legs were still around it, but his head, shoulders and arms remained under the surface.

The next second of time was an awful one to the boy.

But then came a sudden snap and he was free. The chafed rope had given away, and Joe bobbed up just as another blinding flash of lightning lit up the terrible scene.

The end of the log bumped up against the tree which rested partly over it. Joe was struck in the shoulder, but still retained his hold, although he was afraid each moment would be his last.

Finally the log reached the surface of the swollen mountain torrent, for that was what the brook had been transformed into, and went sweeping down the gully at a high rate of speed.

By the flashes of lightning Joe discovered that he was about midway from either shore.

"I had better remain on the log for the present," he muttered to himself, after he had somewhat recovered from the shocks he had received. "I can't swim to the bank in this current."

The remaining bit of rope which bound Joe's hands together had worked loose when the end about the rocks parted, and the boy now managed to entirely free himself.

His hands and wrists were frightfully cut, but he paid no attention to the wounds.

"It doesn't matter so long as I am out of that fearful scrape," was his thought. "Now, if I can only make ground before we bump into something I'll be all right."

But this was no easy matter. The lightning had ceased, saving for an occasional dim flash, and all was black around him.

On and on he was borne until the narrow part of the gully before described was reached.

Here the water ran far over each bank, and the strength of the current on either side was materially less than in the center.

By a fortunate swerve of the log Joe was carried to the left. A second later the log swept past some tall bushes, and putting out his hands the boy slowed its progress.

With great caution Joe managed to work the log still farther to the left, until his feet touched solid ground.

Then he slid from his resting-place, and, holding fast to the bushes, made his way up the slope, while the log swung back and continued on its way down the gully.

At last the swollen stream was left behind, and Joe stood on the solid level of the Coal Road. He was wet to the skin and ached from head to foot.

"The best thing I can do is to get home and go to bed, I reckon," he said to himself, with chattering teeth.

"Such an experience is enough to give a fellow his death."

The rain began now to abate somewhat, and by the time he had reached the Iron-ton turnpike it ceased altogether. Presently several rifts in the clouds were to be seen, and through these the moon shone.

Just before Joe reached Mountainville he heard the clatter of horses' hoofs coming towards him. He listened, while they came nearer, and then two men dashed past, riding at top speed.

The boy turned to distinguish their features, but in this he was disappointed.

One of the men had nearly ridden over the boy in his mad flight, and Joe could not resist to yell after him, asking what he meant by such conduct.

But no attention was paid to his call, and in another second the two riders were out of sight.

"They are riding as if the sheriff was after them," he muttered. "I wonder what is up?"

At length the tavern was reached. But for a solitary light in the bar-room it seemed deserted, and with a single glance at the place Joe passed on.

"Fire!"

Joe started. The cry came from the other end of the village, and was repeated several times.

Joe broke into a run toward the spot whence the sounds proceeded.

"Help! Help! Fire!" came in louder tones, and

then a man dashed past Joe, followed by a woman and a girl.

"What—whose place is it?" cried Joe to the man, whom he recognized as Tom Allon, a carpenter who did odd jobs around Mountainville.

"It's Amos Bemis' store!"

Joe was thoroughly startled.

"You don't mean it!" he ejaculated.

"Yes, it's so. Hurry and call some people, or the whole block will burn down!" went on Tom Allon, and he passed on, leaving Joe in the middle of the road.

The boy was not slow to follow. He, too, began to shout, and soon all the people who lived in the immediate vicinity were aroused.

By this time a bright light in the rear of Amos Bemis' store was to be seen. It grew rapidly, until with a crash the window panes cracked, when the flames shot out and skyward, lighting the fields for a goodly distance around.

"Get out your buckets and get water!" shouted Tom Allon. "This is no time to talk! Water is what we want. Hurry up, every man, boy, and woman!"

This command was obeyed, for in less than five minutes every pail, bucket, and kettle within the town limits had been pressed into service. A fire line was formed, and ere long a steady stream of water was being poured into the burning building by Tom Allon and Joe, who stood on boxes on either side of the window.

From the start Amos Bemis was not to be seen, but inside of ten minutes he appeared. He was in his shirt sleeves and frantic with excitement.

"Who set that place on fire?" he roared. "Who set it on fire, I would like to know? I'll be ruined! I haven't got a cent of insurance on the building!"

"That's where you missed it, then, Amos," said a bystander. "You're always preachin' insurance to the rest of us, too."

To this cut the stationer and real estate agent, who was also an insurance agent, made no reply. He continued to dance around in rage and excitement until he suddenly caught sight of Joe, who, somewhat overcome by the smoke, had just stepped back to make way for another hand at the window.

"Here he is—here is the young villain!" shouted Amos Bemis. "I knew he would try some underhanded game on me! Don't let him get away! I'll teach him that he can't burn down an honest man's store and escape!"

## CHAPTER XIV

### WHAT HAPPENED AT THE COTTAGE

RALPH LUMLEY was hardly awake when he confronted Olney, and the midnight intruder took advantage of the fact by pushing him rudely to one side before the surveyor could offer any resistance.

"Stop!" cried Ralph Lumley. "Stop! Thief!"

"Shut up!" growled Olney. "Shut up, I tell you, or it will be the worse for you!"

He shut off the dark lantern and attempted to pass through the open doorway. But the surveyor, recovering, jumped in the way and blocked the passage completely.

"Get out of the way, do you hear?" howled Doc Olney. "I am not a man to be fooled with!"

"Neither am I a man to submit calmly to being robbed!" retorted Ralph Lumley. "You have a case belonging to me; I saw it."

He hurled himself upon Olney, and together they rolled over and over on the carpet.

At first the surveyor was on top, but by a dexterous movement the robber squirmed from under him and retreated to a far corner of the apartment.

"Let me out of this or I'll fire at you!" came in a low, tense voice.

Ordinarily Ralph Lumley was a brave man, but the words gave him something of a chill. He had no desire to be shot.

"You wouldn't dare!" he cried.

"Wouldn't I, though! You just try me and see. Now move, and be quick about it!"

Something peculiar in Doc Olney's voice caught the surveyor's attention.

"You are one of the men who attacked me in the mountains the other day."

"What if I am?"

"I know your face, and if you attempt to steal anything from this house, sooner or later I will have you brought to justice."

"Bah! you can't scare me! Get out of the way, I tell you, or I'll fire."

Ralph Lumley glided from the doorway. Doc Olney, thinking the way clear, darted forward. The next instant the surveyor had him by the collar.

Then another struggle ensued, which came to a sudden termination when Doc Olney lifted his dark lantern and struck the surveyor a sharp blow over the head.

It was a cruel movement to make. The brass-bound corner of the object landed upon Ralph Lumley's temple and he fell forward with a groan.

Olney bent over him. The surveyor lay as one dead, but his heart still beat.

"I'm glad I didn't finish him," muttered the robber. "I don't want to go quite as far as that."

There was a stir in the next room. The heavy sleep of John Hurley had been broken by the sounds of the scuffle, and he was demanding to know what the noise meant.

Picking up the case which had dropped from his hand, Olney glided from the room and down the stairs, John Hurley shouting after him as he went.

Olney was soon outside. He gave a low whistle, and almost immediately Sam Ridd joined him.

"Have you got it?" demanded the latter.

"Yes."

"It's about time; the gal is kicking up a fine fuss."

"Is she still in the wood-shed?"

"Yes; but she's got the ax, and the door will be down in another minute."

"Come on. We've got that other matter to tend to before we leave town to-night."

"Goin' the whole thing, eh?"

"Sure!"

The two rascals disappeared in the direction of the town center.

In the meanwhile the sounds of hurried blows on the inner side of the wood-shed door could be plainly heard.

A few seconds later the door burst open and Meg sprang out.

The frightened girl still held the ax in her hands, and it would have been a dangerous time for anyone to have attacked her.

"Joe! father! help!" she called, at the top of her voice.

Of course, no answer came back, and, with the strange weapon still in her hands, Meg ran toward the house and entered the kitchen.

Then from above she heard her father calling feebly. She seized the lamp, turned it up, and hurried up stairs.

"What is it? What have they done, father?" she questioned hurriedly.

"I—I don't know!" gasped John Hurley, who was trying to stand up despite several severe pangs of rheumatism. "Something is the matter in Mr. Lumley's room."

"Two men were here. I don't know what they wanted. Mr. Lumley! Mr. Lumley!"

No answer came back, and after some hesitation Meg pushed open the door between her father's room and that occupied by the surveyor.

Then a cry of horror escaped her lips—a cry that made John Hurley forget his great pain and hurry to her side.

"Is he—is he dead?" panted Meg.

"I hope not. Let me feel his heart. No, he is still alive, but he has been struck a foul blow. Run for some water, Meg. Set the lamp on the stand and call Joe."

"Joe has not got back yet. Those men, or one of them, said he had sent them to get the ax."

"They did?"

"But I think it was a made-up story to get me out of the house. They locked me in the wood-shed and one of them stood on guard."

"And the other must have been in the house."

The water was brought and dashed into Ralph Lumley's face. Then Meg bound up his forehead and helped her father get him on the bed.

"Where is he?" asked the surveyor, feebly.

"The man who attacked you?" asked John Hurley, who had sunk on the bed beside him.

"Yes."

"He is gone."

"And the case?"

"What case?"

"The one that was on the bureau."

John Hurley shook his head. Meg looked around for the missing object.

"He must have taken it," said the girl.

"The villain!" groaned Ralph Lumley. He said no more, but his face grew even whiter than before.

By this time it was raining outside in a torrent. The

lightning flashed through the windows of the cottage and made Meg jump with fright.

Nevertheless, the brave girl went below, and, after locking the back door, ransacked the pantry for some remedies she thought might help the sufferer up stairs.

With these she returned to the surveyor's room, and inside of half an hour Ralph Lumley felt once more like himself, although his head pained him not a little.

John Hurley had retired to his own room. He was in a bad state, and it was only sheer will power that kept him from crying out when the pains of rheumatism shot through his body.

"I must find those two men," said Ralph Lumley to Meg. "They must not get away with what they have stolen."

"Can you follow them in this awful storm?" questioned the girl.

"I will do my best."

Meg retired to do what she could for her father. Ralph Lumley donned his heaviest clothing and his rubber coat and put on his storm cap.

"I am going!" he called out; and Meg and her father heard him descend the stairs and pass out of the front door.

The girl ran down and locked the door after him. Then she peered through one of the sitting-room windows and watched him out of sight.

"If only Joe was home," she said to her father, on returning up stairs. "What can be keeping him so long?"

"Perhaps he, too, has met with foul play," said John Hurley, little dreaming, however, how close he had come to the truth. "But I rather think he has sought shelter somewhere from the storm."

An hour went by, and the rain began to slacken up, while the thunder and lightning grew more distant. Meg went below and looked at the kitchen clock. It was after midnight.

She rejoined her father and the two began to speculate on the mixed-up state of affairs. Meg wished to put on her waterproof and rubbers and go down to the town in search of Joe, but Mr. Hurley would not hear of it.

"Wait a while longer," he said.

And while they were waiting a cry from down the road reached their ears—a cry that grew louder each moment.

"What is that, Meg?"

"They are crying 'Fire!' father. Somebody's place in town is in flames!"

## CHAPTER XV

### JOE DEFENDS HIMSELF

FOR the moment all who were at work trying to put out the fire ceased their operations to listen to what Amos Bemis might have to say.

As for Joe, for the second he was too dazed to speak.

That the stationer should accuse him of setting the store on fire when he was doing his best to put out the conflagration was almost past belief.

Yet such was a fact, and Joe realized this to its fullest extent as the half-crazed man caught him by the collar.

"Don't let the young villain get away!" roared Bemis. "Where is Hicks?"

"Let go of me!" cried Joe. "You are crazy, Mr. Bemis!"

"Crazy, am I? Well, maybe, seeing that my property is going to destruction, and all through you!"

"I had nothing to do with it. I just got here a few minutes ago."

"A likely story. Hicks! Hicks! Where are you?"

"Here I am, Amos," and the constable pushed his way forward.

"Take charge of him, and don't let him get away. Understand? I'll have you up yourself if he escapes!"

"I've got him tight enough!" returned Constable Hicks, as his hand closed on Joe's arm.

"I'll see you as soon as we can save all that's to be saved," said Amos Bemis, and off he rushed.

By this time the flames had disappeared from the back window, and the volunteer firemen were getting the best of the fire. The buckets of water were still thrown in, however, until every portion of the one-story building was thoroughly soaked.

"Don't ruin any more of the stock!" shouted Amos Bemis. "Go easy now! Come on inside with me, Allon."

He unlocked the back door and he and the carpenter entered, followed by half a dozen others.

The fire being out, all was now dark within the ruined store. Lanterns were procured from a stable in the neighborhood, and Amos Bemis walked around surveying the damage that had been wrought.

"A thousand dollars wouldn't cover it," he groaned. "No, not fifteen hundred! And all through that boy! I'll send him to prison for this, see if I don't!"

"Are you sure he did it?" asked the keeper of the tavern, who was in the crowd.

"Of course I am."

"Who discovered the fire?" asked another.

"I and my wife and daughter Sal did," replied

Allon. "We were coming from the wedding anniversary over to Shaw's. And, by Jee-ru-salem——" The carpenter broke off short.

"What's the matter?" asked Amos Bemis.

"Come to think on it, the first fellow I saw on the street was Joe Hurley!"

"What!" cried half a dozen voices.

"Yes, the very first."

"Where was he?" and the stationer's voice quivered with suppressed rage and excitement. Any doubt that might have lingered in his mind concerning Joe's guilt was now gone.

"He was about half-way between your store and the tavern," answered the carpenter slowly. "But it 'pears to me he was walkin' this way, not the other."

"That was only a ruse he used when he saw you, most likely," said Amos Bemis. "Oh, he's guilty, and I knew it the minute I clapped eyes on him!"

"But why should he try to burn down the place?" questioned the keeper of the main store in Mountainville, who was inclined to think that Joe was not such a bad boy as painted.

"Didn't he fight me off in court about that pocket-book?" demanded Amos Bemis.

"That's true; but it can't be proved that he took the pocketbook, Bemis."

"Maybe it can't. Oh, he's a sly boy. But I've got him now! I know what I'm doing!"

"Perhaps he can explain why he was out this time of night."

"No, he can't. He ought to have been in bed, especially such a night as this. But he fancied that because it was stormy nobody would see him fire the place, and that he could get back home before anybody discovered the blaze."

"But Allon says he was halfway between the store and the tavern. That don't look as if he was going home from the store."

"Humph. He's a deeper boy than you think, and he did that to put folks off the scent!" growled Amos Bemis, who refused just then to look at matters in a reasonable light.

But the proprietor of the main store in the town shook his head and so did one or two of the others. To them the origin of the fire was a mystery.

Several offered to remain in the building and help Amos Bemis put his stock into shape, but these offers were declined, the stationer stating that he would let matters rest until morning.

But he gave Hicks orders to take Joe to the lock-up, and the crowd followed the constable and the boy toward a disused harness shop which occasionally did duty as the town prison.

"Why don't you take me before Judge Ullman?" asked Joe, somewhat sharply, for he did not relish the way in which he had been treated.

"Can't," returned the constable, laconically.

"Why not?"

"He's over to Harrisburg; went to-day."

"And when will he be back?"

"Perhaps to-morrow—perhaps not till day after to-morrow."

"And will I have to remain in jail till he comes?"

"Certainly."

"It's a shame, Hicks!"

"It can't be helped, Joe. I'm responsible for your keepin'. If I don't do my duty Amos Bemis will be down on me like a ledge of coal."

"He has no right to say I set his store on fire."

"Maybe that's true."

"Do you believe I did?"

"That is not for me to say."

"I worked as hard as anybody to put the fire out. Would I be fool enough to do that if I had started it in the first place?"

Hicks shrugged his shoulders.

"Better not ask me any questions, Joe. I'll have to lock you up, but I'm human, and I'll make you just as comfortable as I can. I see you are all wet."

"Will you send word to my folks?"

"Certainly."

"And also tell Mr. Lumley, who is at our house, that I must see him."

"He can't go no bail till the judge comes."

"I don't want to see him for that. I have something to tell him."

"Oh, all right."

And thus talking, Hicks and his prisoner reached the harness shop, which did duty as a prison.

In the meantime Amos Bemis was busy boarding up the burnt-out window and otherwise making his half-burnt and water-soaked store secure. Now that the fire was out he did not intend to leave any openings where thieves might enter and steal whatever was worth carrying off.

This job took him quite some time, but at last it was accomplished to his satisfaction.

"Now, I reckon things can stay so till morning," he muttered. "And then we'll see how much is gone."

He looked over the ground with close eyes and made a rapid mental calculation that a hundred and twenty-five dollars would cover the actual loss. But to an outsider he would have placed the figure at a thousand dollars—not a penny less!

Before going he walked over to where an old-fashioned safe stood, the top heaped up with old account books.

"I suppose it's safe," he murmured to himself. "But somehow I feel as if I ought to take it home. If I keep it here any longer somebody may come in some day when the safe is open and see it. I'll take it home and bury it under the cellar floor."

He bent over the safe and began to turn the combination knob. Then he gave a gasp as he noticed that the safe was already unlocked.

He flung the door open and held the lantern closer.

"Gone!" he ejaculated. "Gone! Who took it?"

## CHAPTER XVI

### A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE

WHEN Ralph Lumley left the Hurley cottage in search of the man who had robbed him his mind was filled with strange thoughts concerning Doc Olney and Sam Ridd.

He felt certain of one thing, and that was that the two ruffians had been following him up for over a week, with their evil designs fully prepared. He had met them in Ironton, on the road, where Joe came so gallantly to his rescue, and now this was the ending of the game.

"Those two men are acting for somebody else, that's certain," was the thought which crossed his mind. "They did not want that case and its contents for themselves. Now, who can they be in league with?"

This was a question not so easily answered, although Ralph Lumley had his suspicions.

It was still dark outside, and raining heavily. The surveyor paused for a moment on the road. Had the two men gone up or down?

"They may be a good distance from here by this time," he reasoned. "But I must take my chances on that."

He took the road that led away from Mountainville, and passed on for all of a mile.

He saw nothing of Doc Olney and Ridd, nor did he meet a soul who might have given him information.

At last, somewhat disheartened, he turned back towards the town.

It was then that he noticed a strange light flaring up into the sky. He watched it for a few minutes with interest.

"Unless I am greatly mistaken, that's a fire," he said to himself. "And it can't be far from Mountainville."

The light soon after died out, and he gave it no more attention.

Presently Ralph Lumley heard the sounds of a wagon's wheels on the road, and an old farmer on a buckboard drove into sight.

The surveyor hailed him.

"What's wanted, stranger?" called out the old man, as he halted.

"Have you seen anything of two men, strangers, around here?"

"Haven't seen no strangers, 'ceptin' you."

"All right. Thanks."

"Been up to the fire in Mountainville," continued the old man.

"What was it?"

"Amos Bemis' store. That young rascal of a Joe Hurley set it on fire."

Ralph Lumley started.

"Joe Hurley, did you say?"

"I did, stranger. I don't know nothin' about it, but Bemis declares Joe Hurley did it."

"Is the fire out?"

"Oh, yes; an' Joe Hurley's in jail."

"What does he say?"

"Says he had nothin' to do with it."

"And I imagine he tells the truth. Do you want to earn half a dollar?"

"How?"

"Take me into Mountainville on your buckboard. I am tired of walking."

As it had now stopped raining, the old farmer quickly agreed to do the job, and in a minute Ralph Lumley was seated beside him and they were on their way.

The surveyor reached the jail just as Constable Hicks was about to leave Joe locked up and inform the Hurley household of what had occurred.

"Well, Joe, what's all this?" asked the surveyor, as he strode into the harness shop.

"Oh, Mr. Lumley, I'm glad you came! I was just going to send for you."

"This is a bad business. Tell me about it."

"I have very little to say about the fire," responded the boy. "But I've got something else to tell you."

And in a whisper, so that Hicks might not hear, he told of his adventure in the gully.

Ralph Lumley listened with keen interest to every word. When Joe had finished his face grew pale.

"I think I understand the matter now," he said. "I will tell you something later."

"But you will try to catch the men?" questioned Joe.

"I have been trying to catch them."

And Ralph Lumley related what had occurred at the cottage.

"And they got your case?"

Ralph Lumley nodded. Then he motioned toward Hicks, and indicated that he wished Joe to remain silent for the present.

Joe was much perplexed, but he heeded the warning, and the surveyor changed the subject by turning to the constable, and saying:

"See here, Hicks, don't you think you did wrong to arrest Joe?"

"Amos Bemis makes a charge against him," returned the constable.

"Yes, but what grounds has he to substantiate that charge?"

"I don't know."

"Where does this Bemis live?"

"Right across the lots from here, in the old brown house with the whitewashed fence."

"I'll go and see him. It's a shame to lock Joe up."

"Reckon you'll find Amos at his store yet."

"All right. Joe, I'll be back before long."

Then he added in a whisper:

"Don't worry if I'm not. I may go on a hunt for those two men again."

A moment later and Ralph Lumley was gone.

It took the surveyor but a few minutes to reach Bemis' store.

All was dark in front, and the curtains were tightly drawn, for the stationer never left them up during the night.

Ralph Lumley walked to the rear of the store. Here he found the burnt-out window boarded up, but there were several large cracks, from which the light of a lantern streamed.

He applied his eye to one of the cracks, and saw Amos Bemis kneeling in front of the old safe.

"Gone!" he heard the stationer groan. "Gone, true enough. Can it be possible that that boy has discovered my secret?"

The surveyor saw the stationer arise to his feet, and slam shut the safe door and turn the combination knob.

The next moment Amos Bemis appeared at the rear door. He started back in confusion when Ralph Lumley confronted him.

"What—where did you come from?" he stammered.

"I just came from the shop that is used for a jail,"

was the reply. "I want to know, Mr. Bemis, what makes you think Joe Hurley set your store on fire?"

The stationer took an unusually long time to reply. He seemed to be thinking of what would be best to say.

"Because he was seen around here when the fire broke out," he returned, slowly.

"Is that all?"

"Ain't that enough?"

"No. Your store is on the main street of Mountainville, and he has a perfect right to be on that street without coming under suspicion on account of it."

"The boy is down on me."

"Excuse me, but I fancy the boot is on the other leg," observed the surveyor, dryly.

"What do you mean, sir!" blustered Amos Bemis.

"I mean to say that you are down on the boy."

"No more than I ought to be."

"There is where we do not agree. He has never harmed you, while you are causing him no end of trouble. Now, I am that boy's friend, and I propose to stand by him."

"Don't talk rot to me!" growled the stationer, but the statement that Ralph Lumley intended to aid Joe appeared to worry him more than he cared to show.

"It is not rot. You have no right to bring a charge against him unless there is some real reason for it. Unless you withdraw the charge I will bring a counter-charge against you."

"Against me?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"False arrest, and conspiring to ruin the boy's character because he won't work for you at very small wages. He has told me his whole story, and I know something of how you tried to keep him under your thumb."

"It ain't so."

"Well, we'll see, unless you withdraw this present charge."

"Look here," blustered Amos Bemis, who actually seemed to fear the turn affairs had taken. "I ain't going to have my fair name dragged into the dirt through this fire, and the broken windows, and such."

"Then tell Hicks to let Joe go. You know well enough he won't run away, because he is already under bail for that other charge you made against him."

"Well, what do you want?"

"I want you to tell Hicks to let him off till Judge Ullman gets back."

Amos Bemis appeared to meditate deeply for a minute. Then he locked the back door of the store and placed the key in his pocket.

"I'll see Joe, and have a talk with him," he said. "And I want to see him alone."

## CHAPTER XVII

### JOE AGAIN AT LIBERTY

FIVE minutes after the above conversation Amos Bemis appeared at the harness shop. Ralph Lumley had followed him, but again the stationer declared that he wished to see Joe in private.

So the surveyor remained outside, while Amos Bemis tramped back to the room which was used for a cell.

Hicks sat on a bench talking to Joe when the stationer entered, but soon left after being given a hint to do so.

"Now, see here, Joe, I want to settle this matter," began Amos Bemis, and the boy noticed that he paused to wipe the heavy perspiration from his brow.

"That's just what I wish to do," said Joe.

"I don't want to be hard on you, but I want my rights," went on the stationer.

"Well?"

"You ain't done just the proper thing with me, Joe—ain't treated me as you ought to."

"I have not done you any injury that I know of, Mr. Bemis."

"Yes, you have; but——"

"But what?"

"Maybe you thought you had a right to do what you did," whispered the stationer, as he stepped closer.

"Am I right, Joe?"

"Why, of course I had a right to do as I did," replied the boy, somewhat perplexed by the other's manner.

"But you don't understand me—leastwise, don't or won't let on that you do, Joe."

"Don't talk in riddles, Mr. Bemis."

"It ain't no riddle, Joe. I've found you out—I know you *opened the safe*."

As Amos Bemis spoke he glared searchingly into the face before him, as if to read Joe's inmost thoughts.

"You discovered that I opened your safe?" repeated Joe.

The stationer nodded.

"Well, you are greatly mistaken, for I did nothing of the kind."

"No?"

"No; I was not inside of your store to-night."

Amos Bemis walked up and down nervously for several minutes. Joe could see that he was doing some deep thinking.

"Joe, if you will tell me all you know I'll try to explain some matters to you."

"What I know about what?"

"The—you know well enough."

"No, I don't."

"Do you mean to stick to the statement that you haven't been watching me, and that you didn't take anything from the safe?"

"I certainly didn't steal anything belonging to you," returned the boy indignantly.

This quick reply, to which Joe had hardly given consideration, had a curious effect on Amos Bemis. He grew pale and trembled slightly.

"Nothing belonging to me, eh? Then you are sure it belongs to you; is that it?"

Joe noted the change in the man's manner. He was somewhat bewildered, yet shrewd enough to see that Amos Bemis was aiming at a certain object.

He hardly knew what to say. He wished to draw out his former employer, if possible.

"Then you say, Mr. Bemis, that you had something in the safe belonging to me?" he ventured.

On the instant the man faced him fiercely.

"No, I didn't say so, and it ain't so," he cried. "I can prove that I didn't——" He broke off short. "Joe, you're making a big mistake, and going through my safe ain't going to help you any."

"What can you prove, Mr. Bemis?" questioned the boy, not knowing what else to say.

"Never mind that," howled the stationer. "See here, Joe. I'll make you an offer. Give me back that

pocketbook you took, and I won't say a word about this fire—won't press no charge against you—not even for going through the safe.”

“I haven't got the pocketbook.”

“You have.”

“I have not—never saw it.”

Amos Bemis took a deep breath. Then he came even closer than before.

“See, here, boy,” he fairly hissed. “You must remember one thing—you can't prove that what you took from the safe was there. So you can't do me any harm. Now, if you'll promise to keep quiet about that matter I'll let the case against you drop.”

“You'll drop everything?”

“Yes, even the pocketbook matter.”

“If you'll do that I won't say anything about your safe, what's in it or what came out of it,” replied Joe, striving his best to make a deal in the dark.

Amos Bemis' face took on a look of relief.

“You won't go to any lawyer?”

“I won't go to any lawyer.”

“Of course, your folks will talk over matters, but I don't want any publicity; understand?”

“Yes, I understand, Mr. Bemis.”

“Remember, you can't prove anything, Joe, not a word, for my word is as good as yours.”

“I suppose it is.”

At this juncture Hicks came back into the cell and

cut short what promised to be a deeply interesting conversation.

"I would like to know if I'm to stay here all night?" questioned the constable.

"No, Hicks," replied Amos Bemis, and he added: "I—I have fixed up matters with Joe, and you can let him go."

"What?"

"Yes. I—I—I will pay you for your trouble, and we will not mention the affair again."

Hicks stared at the stationer as if he doubted strongly that he heard aright.

"I'm to let the boy go?" he asked, slowly.

"Yes. You know he is already under bail."

"Yes, but——"

"I don't want to be hard on him. He'll be in court all right, so he says, and he'll feel better in bed at home than here."

"Well, I'll be jiggered!"

That was all Hicks said, but it meant a good deal.

Not long after this Joe was on his way to the cottage, accompanied by Ralph Lumley, who all this while had been waiting outside for him.

"It's of no use to try to track those two robbers to-night," said the surveyor. "They have probably gone off to Ironton or some other railroad station."

It did not take the two long to reach the cottage.

Meg was on the watch, and was overjoyed to learn that Joe was safe.

All proceeded to Mr. Hurley's bedroom, where the sick man was now resting comfortably. Everyone had to tell his story, and Meg told hers as well.

The way Amos Bemis had treated Joe was a puzzle to all, and though they speculated on it for some time, nothing came of it.

"I must pump him in a roundabout way when I get the chance," said the boy. "It is some valuable secret. If it wasn't he would never have consented to let me off as he did."

"I imagine you are right," said Mr. Hurley. "But I can't make it out."

The conversation then turned upon Ralph Lumley's loss and what he proposed to do about it.

"Luckily the robbers did not get much of great value—that is, to them," said the surveyor. "The case contained only some old journals pertaining to some surveys made in this vicinity years ago, and some items concerning some oil wells I am interested in. But why they should be following me up is as great a puzzle to me as this Bemis affair is to you."

"Perhaps in surveying we may run across them again," said Joe.

"If we do I hope we will be able to bring them to justice, not only for my sake, but also for yours."

It was almost morning before they retired. Joe was

utterly worn out, and did not wake up until nearly noon. His hands and wrists were still sore, and Meg bathed them for him and bound his left hand up.

A heavy rain had set in, and it was not until two days later that Joe and Ralph Lumley again went to work.

During that time Joe went to see Amos Bemis, but on arriving at the store learned that the stationer had left the business in charge of his brother from Ironton, and gone to Philadelphia.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### AN ENCOUNTER IN THE WOODS

"BRING out the chain, Joe, and we'll go over that line again."

It was Ralph Lumley who spoke. He and Joe were high up on the top of Knob Mountain, surveying a line which passed over half a dozen big rocks.

"Isn't it right, Mr. Lumley?" asked Joe, as he got out the surveyor's chain.

"I want to prove the survey, that's all," was the response. "We can do that, you know, by working backward. That last angle was a sticker, owing to the slope, but I fancy it will prove up O. K."

Joe passed one end of the chain to his employer, and walked off with the other.

His sore wrists were almost well, and the rough treatment he had received at the hands of Sam Ridd and Olney was fast fading out of his mind, so engrossed was he in his new occupation.

Joe took to the profession as a duck takes to water. Indeed, Ralph Lumley had declared that he already knew more about it than Gus Bink had learned in a month.

Fortunately, the boy when at school had always

been apt at mathematics, and this now stood him in good stead. He had mastered the mysteries of the surveyor's chain, and knew how to set up the marks to please his employer. During their spare time Ralph Lumley instructed him in geometry, teaching him the value of all sorts of triangles, for a surveyor's measurements are based largely on the angles and sides of the triangles he constructs.

"By the way," said Joe, after he had called out half a dozen measurements to his employer, "I saw Bink at the tavern door this morning."

"I thought he had left, since I had settled with him," replied Ralph Lumley. "I wonder what he expects to do here?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"Did he speak to you?"

"No, he simply scowled and then went inside. I suppose he would like to chew me up," and Joe laughed.

"Don't be afraid of him. He is at heart a big coward," responded Ralph Lumley.

The end of the line was reached, and taking out his note-book, the surveyor put down a number of figures.

"Now, this is the way we work it, Joe," he said. "You understood how I got those angles, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, now, this line was four chains and a half long. The last was just double that, so if we——"

Bang!

It was the loud report of a gun that startled both of them. It came from a short distance down the mountain side.

"Some hunter," said Joe, who was the first to speak. "But I don't want him to hit me."

"I'll fire my pistol and warn him others are near," returned Ralph Lumley.

He felt for his weapon, and then a look of disappointment crossed his face.

"Pshaw!"

"What's the matter?"

"I left the pistol at home."

Just then came another report. It was not quite so close at hand.

"Sounds as if he was running from us," said the surveyor. "If that is the case there won't be any call to warn him."

"I wonder what he is after?"

"Birds, most likely. There isn't much else up here, I fancy."

"Once in a great while they strike game on the mountains," said Joe, "but it is not often."

"I know that. Two years ago I came upon a deer not over five miles from here."

"Did you bag him?"

"No, I had nothing but a pistol, and before I could get in more than one shot the deer was out of range."



**From behind the thicket lumbered a big black bear.**

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"I shot a couple of foxes up here last year," said Joe. "I followed them all the way from our chicken house. They had killed two chickens and were carrying them off."

"It was clever to trail them, for they are so sly that—— Goodness gracious, look there!"

Ralph Lumley sprang back and pointed to a thicket to the left.

Joe saw that he was greatly alarmed.

"What is it?" he asked quickly.

"Some big black animal."

"Are you sure?"

There was no need for Ralph Lumley to assure Joe that he was, for hardly had the question been asked than from behind the thicket lumbered a big black bear.

"A bear, sure enough!" cried Joe, in alarm.

"We must get out of the way," yelled Ralph Lumley.

"I reckon we can scare him off," declared Joe.

"Hi! hi! get out of here, you brute!"

But the bear did not scare in the least. Instead, he came nearer, and there was an angry light in his rolling eyes.

"He has been wounded!" shouted Ralph Lumley.

"And he is in a regular rage."

"Let's run for it, then!" replied Joe.

Both started to do so in the same direction, and as a consequence they came together so soundly that the breath was knocked out of them completely.

Joe rolled on the ground, and Ralph Lumley went down on top of him. Before either could rise the bear was close at hand.

"Get out of here!" screamed Joe, and the surveyor yelled nearly as loudly.

The bear arose on his hind legs as Ralph Lumley sprang up, and made a snap at the man.

Joe instinctively felt for a stone, and, finding one close at hand, shied it at the creature's head.

His aim was true, and bruin dropped down, hardly knowing what to make of this sort of attack.

This gave the surveyor a chance to get out of immediate danger, and he was not slow in embracing the opportunity.

But it placed Joe in a position of greater danger than even before, for now, with an angry growl, the bear leaped directly upon the boy.

But Joe was nimble, and as the bear came down he doubled up almost into a ball, and before the creature could strike him, with paw or otherwise, he had rolled over out of reach.

"Good for you!" shouted Ralph Lumley. "Now run for it, Joe!"

"That's what I'm going to do," panted the boy. "And you had better do the same."

Ralph Lumley needed no urging. His legs were long, and he put in his best efforts at covering the ground.

Joe essayed to follow, but in rolling on the ground he had received some dirt in his eyes, and this somewhat blinded him.

He covered a distance of nearly fifty feet, and then was compelled to pause, for he could hardly see.

"Come on!" yelled the surveyor. "Don't stop there!"

"I can't see!" replied Joe.

"Can't see?"

"No; my eyes are full of dirt."

"Too bad! Well, run straight ahead. Here, give me your hand."

Ralph Lumley came back, and took his hand. By this time the bear was again close by, and they had to run lively to get out of his reach.

On and on they went through the bushes, until the surveyor gave a sudden cry of alarm.

"Oh, what a fool I've been!"

"What's up now?" queried Joe, still trying to free his eyes from the blinding dirt.

"Can't you see where we are?"

"No; I can hardly see anything."

"We are on the path that leads to that precipice which I pointed out to you as we came up."

"And the bear is still following us?"

"Listen!"

They did so. Yes, the bear was still following, and he was not very far behind.

"Can't we turn back or to one side?"

Ralph Lumley gave a hasty glance around. To one side was a steep wall all of fifteen feet high, to the other a dense hollow, filled with slimy water and rank vegetation.

"We might go down there," he said, "but the chances are that the hollow is full of snakes."

"Ugh! I don't want any more snakes!" shuddered Joe.

He had hardly uttered the words when the bear again appeared in sight, not twenty feet behind them.

## CHAPTER XIX

### A SHORT WAY TO SAFETY

FOR the moment it looked as if the big bear would close in upon Joe and Ralph Lumley.

That the beast was now in an ugly frame of mind was easy to see. His eyes snapped angrily, and he wagged his head from side to side rapidly.

"We'll go on a bit farther," said the surveyor, "and perhaps he will change his mind."

As Ralph Lumley spoke he bounded forward, and seeing this, Joe attempted to follow.

The boy had hardly proceeded three steps when his right foot caught in the roots of some bushes and he went sprawling headlong.

He gave a short, sharp cry as he went down, and this brought his companion to a halt.

"Up, Joe, up!" cried Ralph Lumley. "Quick, my boy!"

But before he could rise the bear was on top of him.

Joe gave a yell that would have done credit to a wild Indian, and endeavored to roll out of the way.

While he was doing this Ralph Lumley picked up

a good-sized rock, and, taking aim, launched it with all force at the bear's head.

The missile struck the bear squarely between the eyes, and with a grunt he leaped backward.

This leap took him to the edge of the path, and he slipped over.

He did his best to drag himself up by his front paws, but before he could accomplish this Joe kicked the paws with his feet, and over went bruin on his back and rolled down and down until he struck the rank vegetation in the hollow and disappeared on the water and mud.

"Good for you!" shouted Ralph Lumley, who had seen Joe's last movements. "Now I reckon he is out of our way, at least for the present."

"It was your throwing the rock that did the business," said Joe. "Supposing we let him have another dose. We may be able to kill him, and the skin is worth considerable."

"We might try it," said the surveyor. "If we kill him the skin is yours, Joe."

Joe got a sharp rock and let fly. His aim was true, The object caught the bear fairly in the forehead just as he was crawling from the mud, and it must have broken his skull, for he tumbled over with a grunt and lay still.

"You've fetched him and no mistake!" cried the surveyor. "Now the question is, how are you going to get down to him?"

"I have the surveying chain with me," replied the boy, producing it. "If you'll hold one end I'll let myself down by the other."

This was done, and presently Joe stood beside the bear. He found the animal still alive, but drawing out his pocket-knife he soon put the beast out of his misery.

"He's dead enough now!" shouted the boy to Ralph Lumley. "But how we are to get him up the slope is a puzzler."

"The hunter who was after him ought be somewhere around."

Ralph Lumley had hardly spoken, when a tall, thin man, carrying a rifle, came up the path on a run.

"Hullo!" he cried. "Say, did you fellers see anything of a—by hickory! there he is!"

"Is this the bear you were trying to shoot?" questioned the surveyor.

"I did shoot him. Is he dead?"

"Yes, he's dead now! The boy just killed him."

"Huh! what are you talking about?" demanded the man, in an ugly tone. "I shot and killed that bear."

"Not much you didn't!" sang out Joe. "I killed him with a rock and my pocket-knife."

"Rot and nonsense!" stormed the newcomer. "I killed him and he's my bear."

As the man spoke he slung his rifle over his shoulder and prepared to crawl down the slope.

"Look out there!" sang out Joe. "It's mighty treacherous——"

Before the boy could finish the man stepped on a slippery piece of ground. Over he rolled, and then came down and landed in the mud and water with a loud splash.

Joe could not help laughing, and he uttered a loud shout, in which Ralph Lumley joined. This made the hunter angry, and as he arose, all plastered with mud, he cried, furiously:

"Wot you laughin' at, hey?"

"Excuse me, but the sight was too comical," said the surveyor.

"Well, it's none of your business; see?" went on the hunter. "Now both of you better clear out."

"Clear out?" queried Joe.

"That's what I said."

"But the bear?"

"I'll take care of the bear. He's my meat."

"Indeed, not!" burst out the boy. "I killed him, fair and square, after he had gotten away from you. Mr. Lumley, there, can prove it, for he helped me do it."

"Yes, the bear belongs to Joe Hurley," added Ralph Lumley.

"He don't!" shouted the hunter, more angry than ever. "You two are in with each other, but you can't do me out of what's my own, understand that!"

For a moment Joe was nonplused, then he said in a quieter tone :

"I suppose you are the man who shot at this bear and wounded him?"

"You've struck it right."

"Well, you didn't hurt him much, for he's gone over a mile since you hit him. He died from being struck on the forehead with a rock, and being finished with my pocket-knife. Examine him for yourself."

But this the hunter did not care to do. His face grew darker than ever, and, turning swiftly, he caught Joe by the arm.

"Now, see here, youngster, the best you can do is to get out of here in double-quick order. I ain't used to quarrelin', but when I get riled——"

And the hunter ended with a savagely suggestive shake of his illy combed head.

"I'll not get out just yet," said Joe, standing his ground firmly. "I claim this bear, and the law would give it to me, too. But since you wounded the animal, I'll tell you what I'll do. You can have half of the meat."

"I'll take all of it, and the skin, too," returned the hunter. "Do you know who I am?"

"I do not know, and I do not care, for that matter."

"I am Philander Pardone, from Iron-ton."

"The livery-stable man?"

"Exactly."

"Well, Mr. Pardone, that makes no difference to me, as I can see."

"It ought to. I am a well-known citizen of this here district, an' you ain't nothin' but a poor beggar boy——"

"All but the beggar!" interrupted Joe, his eyes flashing with a sudden fire. "I am no more a beggar than you."

By this time Ralph Lumley, seeing that something unusual was going on down the slope, resolved to go down. He tied the end of the surveying chain to a tree, and was soon by Joe's side.

"You are making a lot of unnecessary trouble," he said to Philander Pardone. "This bear is Joe's, and you have no right to touch it."

"It ain't!" yelled Pardone. "I claim this here animile, and if you try to take it away from me there'll be trouble. I ain't goin' to be cheated out of my rights by any dandy of a surveyor——"

Before Philander Pardone could go further Ralph Lumley had him by the arm and was gazing sternly into the livery-stable keeper's somewhat frightened eyes.

"You have said quite enough, sir, and now I want you to make tracks out of this neighborhood. I don't allow any such talk in my hearing. Now go, before I help you along."

Philander Pardone hesitated, as if on the point of

making some sharp retort, but suddenly he seemed to change his mind, and he backed away.

"So you ain't goin' to let me have the bear?" he said, sullenly.

"No."

"Very well. I'll get even with you for this, my fine fellows!"

And, aided by the chain, he scrambled up the slippery slope to the path.

Hardly had he reached the latter when he rushed to the tree where the chain was fastened.

In a moment he had the chain loose and in his hand.

"Now get out of that hanged hole the best way you can!" he cried, and threw the end of the chain at their feet.

Then he disappeared in the bushes.

## CHAPTER XX

### RALPH LUMLEY'S IDEA

"WELL, now we are in a pretty pickle," said Ralph Lumley, as he gazed after Philander Pardone in a dazed manner.

"I suppose he thought it was the only way he could get square," replied Joe. "I have heard of him before. People in Ironton say he is a bad man to deal with."

"Then it's a wonder he didn't draw his rifle on us."

"Oh, I suppose he wouldn't dare to do that. Bad men, so called, are usually cowards at heart."

"You are right there."

The two heard Philander Pardone crashing through the bushes above them, and then all became quiet.

"We must find some way to get up that bank, no matter if it is steep," said Joe, after a few minutes' silence. "I wonder if I can't crawl up?"

He started with a run, and ascended perhaps fifteen feet. Then he began to slide, and came down with a rush at the surveyor's feet.

"That won't do, Joe. You can no more go up that bank than you can climb a greased pole."

"I have it!" shouted the boy, suddenly. "Just wait till I get a couple of sticks."

He searched around until two short and stout sticks were found. With his jack-knife he sharpened both of them at one end.

"Now I'll try my luck again," he said.

He rushed up the slide, and as soon as he began to slip, dug one of the sticks into the earth. Then he drove the other stick a couple of feet higher and withdrew the first, and working in this fashion, soon reached the narrow pathway above.

"Good for you!" shouted his employer. "Throw down those sticks to me."

"No need for you to get dirty," replied Joe. "Throw up the end of the chain."

This was done, and after it was fastened to a tree, the surveyor pulled himself up by it.

"But now we are up here, what about your bear?" questioned Ralph Lumley. "We can never draw him up. He must weigh several hundred pounds."

This question perplexed Joe not a little. He knew it would never do to leave the animal there, to be torn and carried off by foxes and other wild animals.

"If you'll stay here I'll run back to our outfit and get that big rope," he said. "Or, better yet, I'll run down to Dan Yates' cabin and get him to take charge

of the carcass for me. He'll be glad to do it for a part of the meat."

"Then you had better do that, for we must finish that survey to-day."

"I'll be back inside of an hour," said Joe, and off he started on a run.

Dan Yates was a poor man living at the base of the mountain. He hunted and did odd jobs for a living, and resided in an old cabin he had built years before.

Joe knew the location of the cabin very well, but did not know the best way of getting to the place.

At last he struck off boldly to the southeast, that being a bee-line as closely as he could calculate it.

He had passed on for about a quarter of a mile, when the path he was pursuing grew fainter and a hundred feet further on died out altogether.

Joe came to a standstill in front of a dark mass of brush, under which the ground was wet and uncertain.

"Well, this is a fine state of affairs," he grumbled. "Now what's to be done? Must I go back?"

It certainly looked that way, and the boy bit his lip in vexation. To go back would mean all of quarter of an hour's delay, and he had already spent more time than he had calculated to.

Bang!

It was a rifle-shot close at hand, and it made Joe jump. He looked around and presently caught sight of a man's form behind the trees at his left.

"Hullo, there!" he sang out.

"What's that?" came back, and a second later Philander Pardone appeared in sight.

"What! so you got out of that hole, did you?" he sneered. "You are rather smart, I must confess. Where's your pard?"

"He stayed with the bear," said Joe. He was sorry now that he had called to the man.

"And where are you going?"

"That's my business."

"See here, boy, don't you be gettin' cheeky," growled Philander Pardone, as he came up closer.

"Then don't ask impertinent questions."

"My, but you're a big youngster for your size. Say, I reckon I'll have to give you a dressing down."

"Don't you dare to touch me," retorted Joe, sharply. "Let me pass."

He attempted to step aside, but Pardone caught him by the arm and threw him up against a tree.

"Not so fast, boy. Now we are alone, I reckon we'll settle this matter between us."

"What do you mean?"

"You stole my bear, and if it hadn't been for your companion I would have settled with you before."

"Were you afraid of Mr. Lumley?"

Philander Pardone's face reddened somewhat.

"I don't want no sass, boy. Take that, and remember you can't come no game over me."

He aimed a sudden and savage blow for Joe's head, which, had it struck the boy, would have felled him to the ground.

But Joe was on his guard, and he dodged. The fist of the man came in unexpected and painful contact with the trunk of the tree. The skin of the knuckles was peeled, and the man set up a cry of pain.

"You little rascal! I'll fix you for this!"

"It was your own fault," retorted Joe. "What do you mean by attacking me in this fashion?"

"I'll show you, you young whelp!"

Again the man rushed forward, a wicked look in his dark eyes.

He struck out once more, and for a second time the boy dodged. Then Joe put out his foot, and Philander Pardone went sprawling head first into the bushes and water.

As he endeavored to rise he muttered fierce imprecations against the youth who had bested him so adroitly. It was several seconds before he stood once more on his feet. Then he looked around.

Joe had disappeared.

"Hi! there! where are you?"

A crashing in the bushes a good hundred feet away was the only reply Philander Pardone got to this question. Clearly Joe was making good use of his time.

"The rat!" muttered the man. "But I'll fix him yet. Now I reckon it's about time I went to meet Ridd and Olney."

And he glided through the bushes in the direction opposite to that which Joe had taken.

## CHAPTER XXI

### A STRANGE NOTE

AFTER Joe ran away from Philander Pardone he had but little difficulty in making his way to Dan Yates' cabin.

Joe found the old man just getting ready to go out fishing.

"O' course I'll go with ye, Joey," said Yates. "So ye really got a b'ar, eh? Well, that's fine luck. Yes, I'll go to onct, my boy."

On the way Joe told Yates how they had captured the bear, and of Pardone's actions afterwards.

"It was a fine trick to roll the bear down into the swamp, Joey," was Yates' comment, "an' then kill him as you did. But you want to beware of that Philander Pardone; he is a thorough rascal, and I've knowed it this many a year."

When they arrived at the path which led to the precipice they found Ralph Lumley pacing up and down somewhat impatiently.

"You've been a long time," he said, after Dan Yates had been introduced.

"I met Pardone again."

And Joe told the particulars of the encounter.

"By Jove! he must be a bad egg!" cried the surveyor. "We will keep a good lookout for him in the future."

Dan Yates agreed to take charge of the bear and cure the skin for Joe for one-half of the meat. The remainder of the meat he promised to take to Ironton and sell to the keeper of the leading hotel. He would turn the money over to Joe the first time they met afterwards.

This settled, Joe and his employer started off to continue the work which had been so suddenly interrupted.

All went well for the balance of the day, and at five o'clock the two returned to the Hurley cottage.

Here rather good news awaited Joe. Mr. Hurley had been feeling unusually well all day, and was hopeful that if he kept on improving he would in the course of a month or six weeks be again on his feet.

"And it can't come any too soon, Joe," said the sufferer. "I'm not the kind of a man to sit down and let my son support me."

"That's all right, father," replied the boy. "You just take it easy till you are yourself again."

Meg was greatly surprised over the bear story, and declared that Joe was a regular hero.

Just as the family were finishing supper, Ralph Lumley with them, there was a knock at the door, and Meg

opened it to admit a neighbor who lived between their house and the more thickly settled portion of Mountainville.

"Good-evening, Mr. Podgers," said the girl. "Walk in."

"I ain't got time, Meg," returned Mr. Podgers, an old man, who wore blue goggles, "'cepting you can tell me what I want to know."

"And what is that?"

"What's become of my two hosses, Tom an' Bess."

"Why, are they missing?"

"Yes, they're missin', and Hank Akers, wot was to take care o' them while I was visitin' my daughter in Philipsburg, is missin', too!"

"You don't say! When did you learn this?"

"Jess now, when I got home."

"Perhaps Akers has gone somewhere with the horses," suggested Joe.

"No; cos he left this note, which I can't make out."

The old man handed a note to Joe, who read it aloud, for the benefit of the others:

"MR. PODGERS: There is no use for me to stay here now that you sent for the team to be took to Ironton, so I will lock up, and, of course, you'll find the key in the old place.

"HENRY AKERS."

"Well, this is plain enough," said Joe. "I sup-

pose he thought the house was safe enough, and as the team didn't have to be fed——"

"But ye don't understand," cried the old man. "I never sent for no hosses."

"You didn't?"

"Nary a one; an' I don't understand it. I believe them hosses hez been stolen, an'——"

"I saw the team!" cried Joe, excitedly. "I saw them the night I came from the ride down the Coal Road gully in the storm. Two men were riding like the wind for Ironton."

"And those men must have been the two robbers," put in Ralph Lumley.

"What a fool I was not to put two and two together before!" said Joe. "Really my head must be getting thick. I never gave those two men on horseback a second thought."

This interested Mr. Podgers, and he had to be told the whole story, to which he listened with rapt attention.

"I reckon you're right, Joe," he said. "But the question is, what became of my hosses?"

"I'll tell you what I'll do, sir," put in Ralph Lumley. "I'll hire a rig down at the tavern, and drive over to Ironton, and see if I can learn anything. You and Joe can go along if you wish."

The others at once agreed, and five minutes later the trio were on the way to the Mountainville hostelry.

The tavern-keeper was not on good terms with the surveyor since the latter had left the tavern and taken up his abode with the Hurleys, so Podgers was sent in to procure a team and a light road-wagon. The old man soon appeared with the turn-out, and at exactly half-past six the three started to drive to Ironton.

As they passed the Coal Road, Joe could not help gazing down the gully, which the freshet had washed almost clean. How close he had been to death down there!

"I reckon the blue box is gone for good now, if it was down there," he thought. "That rush of water would have carried it right down to the river."

It was growing dark by the time the outskirts of Ironton were reached. At the first house they got out, and Podgers, who knew the folks well, put up the team for the while.

"Did you see anything of a couple of men on horse-back the night of the storm?" questioned Joe of the man who came to take charge of their turn-out.

"No, but I heard horses on the road," was the reply.

"What time?"

The man thought for a moment.

"A little while after the storm let up."

"Which way were they going?"

"Straight into town."

After this the boy and Ralph Lumley walked on ahead, Podgers doing his best to keep up with them.

"We are on the track of the horses, that's true," said the surveyor. "But whether we shall run down the fellows who took them is another matter."

They made a number of inquiries, and at last found a negro who said he had seen two horses standing that night in a wood-shed close to Philander Pardone's stables.

"Philander Pardone's stables?" ejaculated both Joe and Ralph Lumley.

"Yes, boss," said the negro.

"Describe them hosses," put in Mr. Podgers.

The colored man did so as best he could. As he proceeded Podgers grew quite excited.

"Them's 'em!" he exclaimed. "Them's 'em sure! I know Philander Pardone well, the skunk! Come on!"

He pushed on without further delay, and wondering what would come next, Joe and Ralph Lumley followed him, never dreaming of the surprise that was in store.

## CHAPTER XXII

### A STRANGE MEETING

It was not far to the livery stables run by Philander Pardone, and the little party soon stood in front of the rather ramshackle building.

To one side was a small room used as an office, and this was lit up by a solitary lantern which hung over the well-worn desk.

Looking through the window Joe beheld Philander Pardone sitting in an easy-chair, smoking a briar-root pipe. The smoke was coming forth in heavy clouds.

"He's evidently enjoying himself," was Ralph Lumley's comment, as he ranged up by the boy's side. "I wonder what he'll have to say when Mr. Podgers faces him?"

"I don't care what he has to say," cried old Podgers. "If he's got them hosses he'll give 'em up putty quick, an' explain matters, too, or I'll know the reason why."

"I have an idea," cried Joe, suddenly, as he drew Podgers' hand away from the knob of the door.

"Wot do you mean, Joe?"

"Let us first go through the stable, and see if we can see anything of your team. If we find the horses,

you'll be better able to talk to him on the subject than if the animals are not to be seen."

"That's true," said the surveyor. "We'll take a walk to the rear."

The three left the vicinity of the office, and were soon at the rear end of the stable.

Here the wood-shed described by the negro was found. It joined the corner of the stable, and was an unusually large building for the purpose for which it had been built.

Ralph Lumley, who was in advance, tried the door, and found it locked.

"Perhaps there's a window on the other side," suggested Joe, and the three walked around, and there saw an opening about a foot square, covered with a bit of wire netting.

Old Podgers lit a match, and, holding it close to the netting, peered into the shed.

"By gosh!" he cried after a few seconds of silence.

"What do you see?"

"Thar's one of 'em hosses!"

"You are sure?" questioned the surveyor, who wished to make no mistake.

"Sure?" repeated old Podgers disdainfully.

"Don't you reckon I know my own hossflesh?"

"Then the negro was right," said Joe.

"Yes, and Philander Pardone has got a heap to explain," said the old man.

He ambled around to the door again, and, putting his shoulder to it, burst it open.

On speaking to the horse within, the animal gave a whinny of recognition.

"You kin bet Tom knows me," said old Podgers, patting the horse affectionately. "Now, Tom, where's Bess?"

But all the glad beast could do was to give another whinny, and rub his nose against his master's hand.

At that moment the three heard a step behind them, and, turning, confronted Philander Pardone.

"Say, what's the meanin' of this?" began the livery-stable keeper, and then he suddenly broke off.

"That's wot I would like to know, Phil Pardone?" burst out old Podgers. "Wot are ye doin' with my hoss?"

"Your horse?" repeated the livery-stable keeper, with well assumed surprise.

"That's wot I said."

"Is this your horse?"

"You know mighty well it is."

"No, I don't."

"You do. Now, I demand to know wot you stole him for?"

And old Podgers ran up and shook Pardone roughly by the arm.

For an instant Philander Pardone was taken aback, then he shook off the old man.

"I never stole a horse in my life, Podgers," he said.  
"There must be some mistake here."

"How did you get this hoss, then?"

"He was left here to keep."

"Who by?"

"I—I don't know."

"You do know," put in Ralph Lumley, stepping forward.

"Hullo! and what have *you* got to do with this business?" burst out the livery-stable keeper, sharply.

"A good deal. I demand to know whom you are keeping the horse for?"

"I don't—that is, he's a stranger to me," stammered Philander Pardone. "You see, I don't know everyone that comes to my stable to leave a horse for a few hours or a couple of days," he rattled on.

"Well, do you know what kind of a looking man he was?" questioned Joe.

"What business is that of yours, boy?" cried Philander Pardone. "I have a perfect right to board horses without being called a thief for doing so."

"That's true, but this here looks right suspicious," said old Podgers, with a grave shake of his head. "Where's the other hoss, that's wot I want to know."

"I have half a dozen horses in the main stable; you can see if he is among them."

Philander Pardone opened the back door leading into the larger building, and they entered. Joe was

certain that the other horse which had been taken would not be found there, and such proved to be the case.

"See him?" queried Philander Pardone, after lighting one of the lanterns and holding it up.

"No, he ain't here," replied old Podgers, somewhat crestfallen.

"Did any other horse come in with Tom?" questioned Ralph Lumley.

"See here, this ain't none of your affair," cried Philander Pardone. "It concerns Podgers and nobody else."

"You are greatly mistaken, Mr. Pardone; this concerns both myself and this boy."

"In what way?"

"That is our business."

"All nonsense! You are mad over that bear affair, and want to get square on me."

"I think we are square on that already," put in Joe, with a queer smile.

"Here, I don't want none of your chaff, boy! I'm a peaceful citizen or I would never have allowed you to ride over me in that affair. I only let you have the bear to keep out of trouble."

"You were very kind," sneered Ralph Lumley. "But let that go. Just now we want know all about this horse and his mate. When did he come in, and who brought him?"

"He came in a couple of days ago," growled the livery-stable keeper.

"Morning, noon, or evening?"

"Look here——"

"Answer my question."

"I won't answer a single——"

"You'll either do that or go to jail, Mr. Pardone. You can take your choice."

At these plain words the face of the livery-stable keeper turned from red to white, and he gave a quick gasp.

"Do—you—mean—that?" he asked, slowly and painfully.

"I certainly do. That horse was stolen, and the man who rode him was a burglar."

"You don't say!"

"I do say it, and, what is more, I am of the opinion that you know all about him."

"No, I don't!" cried Philander Pardone, in sudden terror. "I don't know a single word. He said——" he stopped abruptly.

"What did he say?" put in Joe, quickly. "Did he say he would be back?"

"No—I mean yes. I—I——"

"Did the other man ride away on the other horse?"

"I didn't see the other horse. The man came here, and asked me to keep the horse a few days, and then

went off, and that's all I know about the matter," burst out Philander Pardone.

"Is that the truth?" demanded Joe.

"Of course it is, I ain't no——"

"Has either of the men been here since?"

"Nary a soul."

"You are certain?"

"Say, do you think——"

"Never mind what I think," answered Joe. "I know one thing is certain."

"What is that?" asked Ralph Lumley, thinking he saw something unusual in Joe's manner.

"Olney, the robber, is in the loft overhead."

## CHAPTER XXIII

### WHAT HAPPENED IN THE BARN

As Joe uttered the surprising statement recorded in the last chapter he sprang for the ladder leading to the loft.

"Olney is up there?" ejaculated Ralph Lumley, in surprise.

"Yes."

"How do you know?"

"I saw his face," answered Joe, whose head was now on a level with the flooring overhead.

"Come down out of that!" yelled Philander Pardone. "You saw nobody up there."

But Joe would not listen to him, and a second later was standing in the somewhat dark loft.

The place was filled with loose hay and straw and several boxes and barrels, and for the time the boy knew not how to proceed.

"Bring up a light!" he shouted to Ralph Lumley. "And let Podgers keep watch below."

"I'll do that straight enough," replied Podgers. "An' if Phil Pardone is the honest man he pertends to be, he'll help me."

"You are making fools of yourselves," shouted

Philander Pardone savagely. "I say there is nobody up there, and I know."

"It is possible that somebody got up there without your knowledge," remarked the surveyor, dryly. "Give me another lantern."

"I ain't goin' to have my place searched."

"Oh, but you are! Now, the lantern!"

Philander Pardone began to bluster and use all sorts of threats, but Ralph Lumley paid no attention to him. The surveyor found a second lantern, and with a match from his pocket lit it and started up the ladder after Joe.

In the meantime Joe had advanced several steps in the darkness. He felt certain that Olney was close to him, perhaps within arm's reach.

"Olney, you might as well give in," he said. "We have got you like a rat in a trap."

To this the robber made no reply. Joe listened intently, and heard a faint rustle in the straw, but that was all.

The boy located the sound as best he could, and made a quick dash in the direction.

He made a slight mistake in his calculation, but in turning around his shoulder brushed against the coat of the man he was seeking, and in a moment they were in each other's arms.

"Now, Olney, do you give in?" cried Joe, as he secured a good hold.

"No!"

"We'll see," was all Joe replied.

Then Olney caught him by the throat. It was a firm grip, and for the instant Joe fancied he would be choked to death. But with a quick movement he raised one foot, and planted it on the stomach of his adversary. Olney gave a subdued groan, and released his hold instantly.

By this time Ralph Lumley was on the ladder. The robber heard him coming, saw the flash of the lantern as it illuminated the rafters overhead, and plunged out of sight behind the pile of hay and straw.

"Quick!" cried Joe. "He is trying to get away!"

"How can he get out of here?" asked Ralph Lumley, as he sprang beside the boy, lantern in one hand and revolver in the other.

"There is a front window for hay. He may drop from that."

The lantern rays were flashed round the somewhat large opening. Olney was nowhere to be seen.

But the banging of the door of the front opening proved that Joe's surmise had been correct.

Olney had found his way over the pile of hay, and reached the opening.

"Run to the front!" cried the surveyor to old Podgers. "He is going to drop from the window!"

Olney heard this cry, but he paid no attention to it. He reached out, and caught the pulley beam fastened

to the upper part of the opening, and swung himself clear of the building.

Old Podgers had come outside, and he was just in time to have the robber drop on him so heavily that the old man went down like a flash.

"Help! help! I'm killed!" he roared.

"He's gone!" said Joe. "Run down after him. I'll drop from the window."

Ralph Lumley had already returned to the ladder, and was descending as fast as his legs would permit. Joe darted for the opening, through which the moon shone, and was about to climb through and down when something reached his sight which caused him to pause.

Across the floor was cast the shadow of a man's head.

It was close to the top of the white square made by the moonbeams which shone through the open window.

Joe sprang back, and then his eyes were turned upward.

At the same time the shadow disappeared.

"Come down out of that!" cried Joe, into the gloom under the peak of the roof. "Come down. I saw you."

"Hang the luck!" came in the voice of Sam Ridd, and then Joe knew that the second robber was resting on the rafter braces just above his head, and that the man had been bending down to watch the fate of his companion on the ground outside.

The next moment Sam Ridd dropped to Joe's side.

The boy was on the watch for him, and hardly had the man's feet touched the flooring than Joe had him by the neck.

"Let go of me!" yelled Ridd. "I ain't done nothin'!"

"Oh, no. Perhaps you don't remember——"

"What, you!" burst out the robber in evident amazement. "Why, I thought——"

Hardly had he spoken, when Sam Ridd wheeled around and struck Joe a staggering blow straight between the eyes.

Joe went down on his back, but as he did so he managed to catch his assailant by one foot.

The result of this was that Ridd slid forward, and the upper part of his body shot through the ladder opening and hung head downward.

"Stop! I'll be killed!" he howled, in sudden fright. "Don't shove me down on my head!"

"I ought to by rights," cried Joe, as he tried to collect his somewhat scattered senses. "You struck me most foully."

"It—it was an accident," whined Ridd. "You see, my foot slipped."

"Humph! A poor excuse is worse than none, Ridd."

"Pull me up, will you, Hurley?"

"No; stay where you are, or I'll shove you down just as hard as I can."

"Don't do that."

"Then shut up."

Ridd began to move his arms wildly in a desperate endeavor to catch hold of something with which to save himself should Joe, who was now on his guard, attempt to shove him down head foremost.

At last one hand caught the ladder, but this was not nailed tight, and it swung away from the opening, and went down with a crash, carrying Sam Ridd with it, and Joe on top of him.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### A NEW CHARACTER ON THE SCENE

FOR the time it looked as if Sam Ridd had been killed outright. He came down with a dull thud on his head, and lay perfectly still.

Joe slid over him and rolled on his side, escaping with but a few scratches.

He was horrified to see blood pouring from the robber's mouth, and quickly knelt beside the man.

"Ridd, are you hurt much?" he asked, in a kindly tone.

The robber's only reply was a groan, and Joe breathed a sigh of relief to learn that the man was not dead.

The boy procured some water, which was close at hand, and dashed this over the robber's head, and also washed the man's face, turning him over on his back for the purpose.

At this treatment Ridd gave several gulps, and finally opened his eyes.

"Da—da——" he moaned.

Then he put out his tongue, and Joe saw that he had

bitten into that member deeply, and it was this which had caused the flow of blood.

It was several minutes before Ridd could sit up, and just as he attempted it old Podgers came in, followed by Philander Pardone.

"Where is Olney?" questioned Joe, quickly.

"Gone."

"Gone?" ejaculated Joe.

"Yes; got away at the last minnit."

"And where is Mr. Lumley?"

"Gone after him."

"Do you think he will catch him?"

"He ain't got much show. Olney started for the mountains, and he seems to be a good runner."

"Well, help me take care of this man, will you?"

"Certain."

"You had better call an officer of some sort."

"Is that necessary?" asked Philander Pardone, uneasily. "He looks as if he was too much hurt to attempt to escape."

"I won't run any chances," said Joe, decidedly.

"Say, don't have me arrested," mumbled Ridd, who was now trying himself to stop the flow of blood from his bitten tongue. "You won't gain nothin' by it."

"I think I shall."

"You won't. If you'll let me go I'll tell you something worth your while."

"I know all I care to know about you," said Joe. "You are a horse thief and worse, and that's enough."

"My gracious, I didn't know them men was up in the loft," put in Philander Pardone, thinking it about time to say something to clear himself.

"Perhaps not, but we'll see about that later," returned Joe, briefly.

"I never did anything wrong in my life."

"Oh, come, Pardone!" said Ridd. "You can't sneak out of your part of this transaction now."

"What! you implicate me?" screamed the livery-stable keeper, white with fear and rage.

"The boy knows a thing or two; he's not a fool."

"I never saw you before," ejaculated Philander Pardone. "I saw your friend, but not you, and you sneaked in here on the sly."

"We'll straighten this out in court later," interrupted old Podgers. "Now, git up there an' come along."

He caught Ridd by the arm, and the man arose to his feet and turned to Joe.

"You won't give me the chance I ask for?"

"No."

A few minutes later Sam Ridd was marched to the Ironton lock-up, followed by Philander Pardone, who kept asserting his own innocence at every step.

A charge was made against Ridd, and he was locked up in default of bail. The livery-stable keeper, being

a land owner, was allowed to leave on his own recognition.

An hour later Ralph Lumley returned to town. He was all out of breath, and his clothing was torn and muddy.

"I chased Olney to the woods and over the Randon Ledge," he said. "Once or twice I thought I had him, but he finally got away."

The surveyor was much pleased to think that Sam Ridd had been captured and turned over to the authorities.

"But what of the second horse?" he asked.

"Ridd says he knows nothing of the horse," said old Podgers, who was with Joe. "But I'll find the creature yet, if it takes the rest of the summer to do it."

"I am sure that those two men were in league with Philander Pardone," said Joe. "And what is more, they were at the livery stable for a purpose."

"I am inclined to believe you are right," said Ralph Lumley. "They would certainly not hang around that loft for nothing. If their thieving work was done they would skip for 'pastures new,' as the saying is."

"Philander Pardone knows a good deal more than he is willing to let out," went on the boy. "I believe he will bear watching, and I am going to play the spy and see what turns up."

The matter was talked over for all of half an hour, and then the three went back to the stable and procured

Podgers' horse and apparently departed for Mountainville.

But after the turn-out, which had been left at the farm-house, was brought out, Joe left the others, and in the darkness stole back to the vicinity of the livery stable.

All was now dark about the place, the lantern in the office having been extinguished.

Taking great care that he was not being observed, Joe stole around to the wood-shed.

As he rounded the corner, he heard someone open the back door of the stable cautiously.

"Hang that door!" he heard a man mutter, as the hinges began to creak loudly.

At length the door was open wide enough to allow the passage of a man, and the person slipped inside.

Hardly daring to breathe, Joe tiptoed his way to the door, which had been left open to the extent of only an inch or so.

All was pitch dark within the structure, but presently came the scratch of a match, and then a tiny bluish flame, which quickly turned to yellow, lit up the scene.

"Now, I must go upstairs, and see if those two fools left anything worth having behind them," muttered the stranger. "Confound it, if the ladder ain't down."

The match went out before Joe could get a look at the man's features. But soon another was lit, and it

was applied to a bit of candle, which the man took from one of his pockets.

Joe looked at the man eagerly. Where had he seen that individual before?

Suddenly he gave a start of recognition, as his mind went back to scenes which had transpired years before.

The man was Bart Pangler, the fellow who had defrauded his father and escaped from justice.

## CHAPTER XXV

### IN THE LOFT

FOR the time being Joe could do nothing but stare at Bart Pangler in a dazed way, hardly daring to breathe.

What could have brought this man to this place at such an hour of the night?

Of course many thoughts went like a flash through the boy's mind. He remembered how his father had been swindled, and how Bart Pangler had fled from justice. And he also remembered what he had heard Ridd and Olney say concerning this criminal.

What could it all mean? Was Olney and Ridd's visit to the cottage for Pangler's benefit, and if so, what had they tried to steal—what had they carried off belonging to his father or to Ralph Lumley?

These and a dozen similar questions forced themselves upon Joe's mind, as he watched the criminal in his endeavor to raise the ladder to the loft opening above.

At length the top of the ladder was secured, and then taking up the bit of candle he had allowed to rest on the feed box, Bart Pangler mounted the steps to the flooring above.

Joe hesitated only for a moment. Then curiosity compelled him to follow the man.

With his heart almost at a standstill, the boy crawled up the ladder noiselessly until his head was just above the level of the flooring above.

He saw that Bart Pangler had moved away from the opening, and was searching among the boxes and barrels shoved far under the sloping roof.

Watching his chance, Joe lifted himself up and crawled swiftly behind the pile of hay and straw before mentioned.

"Well, it begins to look as if they left nothing," he heard Bart Pangler mutter, after an interval of five minutes—an age it seemed to Joe. "Now, what could they have done with it? Could Olney have carried it off? If he did, he's not such an all-round fool as I took him to be, although he and Ridd did enough botch work."

Pangler continued his search, and several times Joe had to move to keep from being discovered. Once Pangler passed within a foot of him.

In the stillness of the barn a step sounded presently, coming from outside, the next moment the front door was opened and a man walked in. He carried a lantern turned up to its full height.

"Hullo! who put that ladder in place?" he cried, and Joe recognized Philander Pardone's voice. "Can it be that somebody has been on the search?"

Pardone came up the ladder quickly, and Bart Pangler had no time to hide, even had such been his intention, which was doubtful.

"What! you here, Pangler!" cried Pardone, taken aback by the unexpected meeting.

"Hush! don't mention that name!" returned the other, quickly.

"Huh! Nobody can hear me, I'm thinkin'."

"Don't be too sure about that."

"I came back from the jail to see that all was locked up again," went on Philander Pardone, after a slight pause.

"They have Sam Ridd?"

"Yes, he's behind the bars."

"Has he blabbed anything?"

"Not yet, but there is no telling what he may do when he is examined again."

"He must be careful," growled Bart Pangler. "Pardone, you must find a way to warn him."

"Me?"

"Yes. You can approach him easier than I."

The livery-stable keeper contracted his brows. Evidently he did not relish the task Pangler had delegated to him.

Pangler continued his search for a minute or two longer.

"Look here, what are you up to?" demanded Pardone, presently.

"I am looking to see if Olney left anything behind."

"I reckon not."

"Why?"

"He wouldn't be such a fool."

"He's been fool enough!" growled Pangler. "He's made a regular mess of his work here."

"It was on account of that Hurley," returned Pardone. "He is as sharp as a steel trap."

"Yes, he's a smart boy, I know. But work him right and you can get around him just as I got around his father."

Joe listened to this talk in silence.

"We'll see if you get around me," he thought. "I shall do my very best to outwit you all."

"See here," said Pardone, suddenly. "What are you goin' to make out of this here deal?"

"I can't tell yet," returned Bart Pangler, evasively. "I'll know inside of a month."

"Olney calculated that you would rake in fifty thousand or more in Philadelphia from Morton."

"He knows nothing of it!" cried Pangler, angrily. "He had better keep his mouth shut."

"Oh, I know you, Pangler," retorted the livery-stable keeper. "You will try to rake in the money for yourself, and——"

"Pardone, didn't I always use you right?"

"Perhaps, but——"

"I did, and I'll use you right now, if you'll only give me time."

"All right then."

"Now, tell me one thing; did Olney leave anything with you?"

"Nothing at all."

"And where is that other horse?"

"Sent him to Harrisburg to be sold."

"You shouldn't have done that. They may trace the animal up, and that will cause trouble."

"They won't trace that horse up," replied the livery-stable keeper. "I sent him to Dawson, and Dawson will send him right on to Philadelphia."

"It wasn't worth while for the risk you run. You'll make enough out of this if my deal with Morton goes through."

"When will you see Morton?"

"Soon."

"In Philadelphia?"

"Yes."

"He will pay cash?"

"I'll try to fix it that way."

"Does he suspect anything wrong?"

"Of course not. Morton is a strictly honorable fellow."

"He'll be stuck bad if they ever find out about the deal and John Hurley comes down upon him."

"I don't care about that. I'll get the money, settle

up with you and the others, and then disappear. If he——”

Bart Pangler did not finish, for at that juncture a stifled sneeze alarmed both him and his companion.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### A FRIEND IN NEED

"SOMEBODY is up here!" cried Philander Pardone, turning pale.

"Who can it be?" shouted Bart Pangler, hoarsely. "Quick, Pardone, search for the rascal!"

The two made a rush for the spot whence the sound had proceeded, and in a moment caught sight of Joe, who had tried in vain to hold back the sneeze which *would* come.

"It's that young Hurley!" gasped Pardone.

"By the boots! you are right!" responded Bart Pangler. "Come out here, you scamp!"

"He'll ruin us!" went on the livery-stable keeper, in a trembling voice.

"He will if he gets away from us," replied Bart Pangler, significantly.

The words caused a shiver to run down Joe's backbone. He well understood the meaning of the villain's insinuation. He looked around and then made a quick dash for the ladder.

"Stop him!"

Joe jumped on the rungs of the ladder and tumbled

rather than climbed to the bottom. Hardly had he reached the flooring below than Bart Pangler was on top of him.

"I'll fix you!" he growled in the boy's face. "I'll teach you to play the spy!"

He caught Joe by the throat and forced him over on his back.

"Let—let up!" gasped the boy. "Don't choke me to death!"

To this the man made no reply. But the look on his face told plainer than words that Joe need expect small mercy from him.

By this time Philander Pardone was coming down the ladder, lantern in hand.

"Have you got him?" he asked in a trembling voice.

"Yes, and I'll——"

"Help! help!" cried Joe, managing in some manner to free his throat from the grip of the fellow on top of him. "Help!"

"Shut up!" hissed Bart Pangler. "Shut up, you young whelp!"

"I won't. Help! hel——"

Again the man tried to get his hand on Joe's throat, and once more the boy squirmed out of his reach.

"Here, lend a hand, Pardone!" cried Pangler, panting in his efforts to hold Joe down. "We must——"

"Somebody is comin'!" howled the livery-stable keeper. "You had better clear out!"



At the opening appeared the form of Dan Yates, the hunter.  
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"Lock the door!"

Pardone hesitated and then sprang to do his companion's bidding.

But he was too late. The door burst open with a crash and at the opening appeared the form of Dan Yates, the hunter.

"What's goin' on here?" he demanded. "You are ye— by june-bugs, ef it ain't Joey! Let up thar, ye villain!"

Bart Pangler sprang to his feet and faced the intruder. Then he gave a start.

"Dan Yates!" he gasped almost unconsciously.

"Ef it ain't Bart Pangler!" roared the old hunter. "The biggest fraud in the country, barrin' none! What are ye doin' to Joey, tell me that?"

"It's none of your business!" snapped Bart Pangler. "This is my affair."

"Ho! ho! jest listen to the man. Why, we——"

"Don't let this man get away!" cried Joe, as he saw Pangler glance toward the open doorway. "I want him arrested and——"

"Stand aside!" interrupted Pangler, and he hurled Dan Yates from his path as if the hunter had been of straw. "Come with me, Pardone."

On the instant he was outside, and the livery-stable keeper followed him.

Dan Yates picked himself up quickly and jumped after the pair, Joe by his side.

But the moon had gone under a dense bank of clouds, and beyond the circle of light made by the lantern all was exceedingly dark.

"Catch him, Dan!" cried Joe. "He must not get away from us."

"Easier said than done, Joey!" puffed Dan Yates. "I ain't much good on the run any more. But here is tudder one."

As the old hunter concluded his hand fastened itself upon the collar of Philander Pardone's coat, and that sneak was brought up with a twist that made him scream with alarm.

"Don't kill me!"

"Then stand whar ye are!"

"All right! This is a dreadful mistake! I haven't done anything wrong!"

Seeing that Dan Yates had brought Pardone to a halt, Joe continued after Bart Pangler, who was now dashing down the black road at a high rate of speed.

On and on went man and boy. But gradually the footsteps ahead died out utterly, and then Joe realized that the man who had swindled his father was beyond his reach.

The boy hurried back to the livery stable, and found that Dan Yates and Pardone were in the office, the latter trying to offer numerous proofs as to his entire innocence of wrongdoing.

"I never did anything wrong in my life," whined Pardone. "Hurley can't prove a thing against me."

"You may let him go, Dan," said Joe to the old hunter. "The other man was the one I wished to catch."

"But this chap wanted to harm you——"

"Never mind; let him go. He has got to answer in court for having a stolen horse in his possession."

So Philander Pardone was allowed his liberty, somewhat to his own astonishment. He was not shrewd enough to understand that Joe was playing a certain game which had just entered his mind while returning from his unsuccessful pursuit of Bart Pangler.

"I was just coming from the hotel, where I sold the bear's meat," explained Dan Yates. "I've got eight dollars in my pocket for you, Joey."

"Keep it, Dan, for your service this night," said Joe; and despite the old hunter's protestations, he would not touch a cent of the money.

Soon after this Dan Yates hurried off, saying he would go on a still hunt over the mountains for Bart Pangler. Joe allowed him to depart, although he knew the search would in all likelihood prove fruitless.

The boy remained with Philander Pardone, and as soon as he was sure they were alone, he boldly faced the livery-stable keeper.

"Now, Pardone, I want you to tell me all you know

concerning Bart Pangler and his doings," he said abruptly.

The face of the man changed color perceptibly, and he winced at the words.

"Me? I don't know nothin'——"

"You know everything, Pardone, and I want you to make a full confession."

"I—I can't," whined the livery-stable keeper.

"Yes, you can."

"If I do Bart Pangler will 'most kill me!"

"And do you know what will happen if you don't confess?"

"What?"

"I'll have you sent to the State prison, just as sure as my name is Joe Hurley."

"You can't do it!"

"I can. I overheard all your talk with Pangler."

The livery-stable keeper remained silent for several seconds. Evidently he thought himself in pretty "hot water."

"If I tell you all, will you promise not to prosecute me?" he asked finally.

"I want to hear what you have to say first. I'll be as easy as I can after that."

"I didn't want to go into this thing," groaned Pardone. "But Bart Pangler held a sort of grip on me, an' there was no let up to him."

"And so he hired you to help Ridd and Olney?"

"That's it."

"What did you do for them?"

"I found out some things for them about Lumley, the surveyor."

"What things?"

"I used to own a tract of land on the mountain. I went to Lumley about it, and took the chance to find out about some land he owned up near the Victory Mine."

"Does Ralph Lumley own land near that mine?" questioned Joe, eagerly as he remembered all of what his father had said concerning the oil wells in the region.

"He does, and so does somebody else own a valuable mine there," went on Philander Pardone, closing one eye suggestively.

"Who?"

"That's telling."

"Do you mean my father?" demanded the boy excitedly.

"Maybe I do."

"Tell me the truth."

"Will you promise to be easy on me if I do?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll tell you. Your father owns a very rich tract of land right up near the new oil wells. Bart Pangler is doin' his best to get all the papers and such in his possession, an' then he's goin' to sell the mine."

"You are sure of this?"

"Dead certain. But don't let Pangler ever know I told you, for he'd kill me."

"Has he all the papers now?"

"Most of 'em. But there is one old deed that is missing. I believe it was in a box——"

"A blue tin box?" interrupted Joe.

"A tin box—yes; but if it was blue I don't know."

"And Pangler doesn't know where that deed is?"

"No. He was to get it somewhere, but somehow or another it disappeared."

"And Olney had the other papers?"

"Yes, but he's to give 'em to Bart Pangler soon."

"Where will they meet?"

"In Philadelphia. Olney won't give up them papers exceptin' for cash."

"But now that matters are so upset, will they meet?"

"I don't know about that. You see, I don't know everything that's goin' on. But I do know that Bart Pangler is goin' to try to swindle your father out of a fortune, and do it, too, without your father being the wiser."

"Do you know anything of this Mr. Morton he is going to meet?"

"Not much, exceptin' he's a rich New Yorker who is going to buy the claim from Pangler."

"And after this transaction Pangler was to settle with you and the others?"

"No. He was going to settle with Olney for all of us, and then Olney would divide up with Ridd, and pay me for my trouble."

Joe questioned the man much further, and it was almost morning before he took his departure.

"I believe I am on the right track at last," said Joe to himself, as he started on foot for Mountainville. "Won't father and Meg and Mr. Lumley be astonished when they have learned all I have found out?"

Joe was a good walker, and just now the news he carried lent speed to his legs, and he got over the ground with unusual rapidity. Before sunrise he was more than halfway home.

As he approached the spot where the Coal Road joined the Iron-ton turnpike he heard a mad clatter of hoofs on the road just ahead.

A second later a man's voice came to him, calling loudly for help.

Joe stood still, at a distance not far from the edge of the gully, which at this spot ran close to the roadway.

"Help! stop the horses!" he heard, in rather a heavy voice. "Stop 'em, or I'll be killed!"

Then a light buggy dashed into sight, drawn by a team of wild bays. The reins had dropped beneath their feet; they had the bits in their teeth, and were making straight for the gully!

Joe caught one sight of the occupant of the vehicle. It was Gus Bink, the young man who had formerly assisted Ralph Lumley and the person who had caused the trouble at Amos Bemis' store.

Then, as the mad horses leaped for the yawning opening so close at hand, Joe sprang to their heads to do what he could to save the young man's life.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### GUS BINK IS ASTONISHED

It was no insignificant thing to rush to the heads of a runaway team and endeavor to stop them, and it was only Joe's natural bravery that caused him to undertake the perilous task.

By good luck he managed to catch one of the horses around the neck. The next instant he was nearly dragged under the beast, and had he lost his grip he would undoubtedly have been killed.

But the brave boy held fast, and as soon as he could regain his breath he gave a swing and reached the horse's back.

"Save me! Save me!" shrieked Gus Bink, in abject terror. "Save me and I'll give you a—a—thousand dollars!"

By the tone of his voice Joe felt certain that the young man had been drinking and was slightly under the influence of liquor.

If the truth must be told, Gus Bink had hardly been sober since he had been discharged from Ralph Lumley's employ. In his own peculiar manner he had

realized his disgrace, but he had not the moral courage to brace up and take a fresh start.

"Sit still and I'll stop the horses," was Joe's reply to the young man's frantic appeal to be saved.

"We'll go over into the gully," howled Gus Bink, as he endeavored to stand upright in the vehicle, which was now swinging from side to side violently.

"Sit down!" yelled Joe. "Do you want to be pitched out on your head and killed?"

The idea of losing his life as Joe suggested was too much for Gus Bink, and with another howl of despair he sank back on the seat and clung fast with all his might.

While Joe had been speaking he had not been idle. He saw that the reins had dropped directly between the two horses, and how to get them in hand was a problem.

But Joe did not stop long to consider the matter. Something must be done quickly or it would be too late. Less than a hundred yards ahead the road made a sharp turn, and it was more than likely, should the buggy reach that point, it would overturn, and both Bink and himself, and perhaps the team, be thrown heels over head into the gully.

Watching his opportunity, Joe lowered himself between the two animals, which were still spurting along at top speed, and with one quick swoop gathered up the lines.

A moment later he was in the buggy. The lines, which had been considerably tangled, were straightened out, and then began a management of the team which was as novel as it was effective.

Joe began to speak to the horses in a low but sharp tone, meanwhile holding them well in hand. Then, when he felt certain that they were paying some sort of attention to him, down came the whip on the back of each.

"Whoa!" he cried, and drew them up tight.

Of course they started off, but in that moment of alarm Joe pulled the bits into place, and soon they were once more under control. The dangerous spot of the road was passed, and a hundred feet farther on the horses were brought to a halt.

"Now they are all right," said Joe, as he turned around to Gus Bink.

"Are you sure they won't run away again?" asked the young man nervously.

"No, I'm not! But they are all right for the present."

"Good for you, I'll—— By Jove!"

"What's the matter now?"

"If it isn't the boy that's got my job! I didn't recognize you before! This beats all!"

"I'm glad I came up in time," said Joe, coolly.

"So am I. But—but—I didn't think you would do me such a good turn."

"Oh, that's all right," returned Joe modestly. "I didn't want to see you killed."

"Did you know it was me in the buggy?"

"Yes."

Gus Bink shook his head slowly. Such treatment was more than he could understand.

"Say!" he said presently.

"Well?"

"You're a great fellow."

"What do you mean?"

"A great fellow—a fine fellow, by Jove!"

"Thank you."

"I mean it—I really do. I promised myself to get square with you for taking my job from me, but now—hang me, if I'm not sorry I said what I did to you at the tavern."

"That's all right, Bink."

"You can bet I won't try to get square now, for the only way to do it would be to save your life at the risk of my own and—well, I am no great hero."

"Where do you want to go?" questioned Joe, wishing to change the subject.

"What do you mean?"

"Where are you going to with the team?"

"I was going to Ironton, but I reckon I'll go back to Mountainville now."

"Then I suppose I can ride with you."

"Certain, if you are not afraid of the horses," and Bink gave something of a sickly laugh.

"Oh, I guess I can keep them in hand now. What scared them?"

"Something in the bushes. I believe it was a man with a white bundle."

"A tramp?"

"Most likely."

The heads of the horses were turned back, and a moment later they were bowling toward Mountainville at a rapid rate.

"I reckon I had better turn over a new leaf," said Gus Bink on the way. "I was out with some men last night, and they got me to gamble away every cent I had. Then I hired this team, and if it hadn't been for you I would most likely have been killed."

"Yes, turn over a new leaf by all means," said Joe. "And if I were you, the first thing I would do would be to quit drinking."

"I reckon you're right."

A few moments of silence followed, and then Gus Bink nearly jumped from his seat.

"By Jove!"

"What's up now?"

"I believe I can do you a good turn."

"Thank you."

"Do you remember that night Amos Bemis' store was burned?"

"Indeed I do," replied Joe bitterly.

"He says you fired the place."

"He has withdrawn that charge," said Joe.

"Well, he had better, for I think I know something of how that place got on fire."

"You?" cried the boy, in astonishment. "Were you there?"

"I passed the store just a short while before the fire was discovered."

"And what did you see?"

"I saw two men coming from the rear of the place."

"Who were they?"

"I don't know. One of the men had a bundle under his arm."

"Why didn't you speak of this before?"

"I was afraid of getting into trouble myself, and besides——" Gus Bink broke off short.

"What?"

"Well, if I've got to tell the truth, I didn't want to put myself out to clear you. It was awful mean, but I was terribly down on you—then."

"I see."

"I thought I would just keep quiet and let you take the blame, and that would be my revenge. I was a scoundrel."

"You haven't the least idea who the men were?" asked Joe, with keen interest.

"They were strangers in town; I'm pretty certain

of that. Just as they passed the tree behind which I was standing I heard one of them ask the other if he knew where the horses were kept, and the other said he had been told where the stable was, or something like that."

These simple words for the moment seemed to stagger Joe. He almost held his breath. The mystery was explained.

"They did it!" he cried. "I'll bet a hundred dollars they did?"

"Who? Did what?" questioned Gus Bink.

"They set the place on fire, and——" Joe broke off short. "But what did they take?" he mused.

"What are you talking about?" queried Gus Bink, who could make neither head nor tail of what the boy was saying.

"I can't tell you just yet," replied Joe. "But I'll do so later on. Here we are. You don't know which way the men went?"

"Yes, that way."

And the young man pointed in the direction of Mr. Podgers' place.

"Good! Now I'll tell you what I'll do, Bink; I'll put in a good word for you with Ralph Lumley."

"Yes, but you've got the job."

"That's true, but he said yesterday that perhaps next week he would need even more help. I'll try to get him to give you another trial."

"Will you? Say, you're a staving good fellow!"

And Gus Bink's face glowed with genuine earnestness.

The two soon after separated, and Joe hurried home.

His story was listened to with much interest.

"Bart Pangler is just the villain I thought him," cried Mr. Hurley, who was feeling much better and was sitting up. "So Philander Pardone says the tract of land is mine? Well, I wish I could get hold of Olney and Pangler, and the papers."

"I would like to know what Olney and Ridd stole from Amos Bemis," said Joe.

"Yes, that is certainly a mystery," put in Meg, "especially after he acted so queer to you at the jail."

"Perhaps he knows something of this matter," said Mr. Hurley. "Come to think of it, he and Bart Pangler once had some dealings together up there."

"They did?" cried Joe.

"Yes. It was about a tract of land on the Knob."

"I'm going to see Amos Bemis at once," he declared. Joe, struck with a sudden idea.

"Not before you've had breakfast," said Meg.

"All right, Meg, but hurry it up. Where is Mr. Lumley?"

"He went off on another hunt for that Olney."

After swallowing a hasty breakfast, Joe set off for Amos Bemis' store.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### SOMETHING OF A REVELATION

WHEN Joe arrived at the store kept by Amos Bemis he found the real estate dealer busily engaged in giving directions to Tom Allon in regard to refitting the burnt portion of the place.

"And see that you give me a good job for the money, Allon," Bemis was saying.

"I'll give ye a first-class job, but it must be at my figger," replied the carpenter.

"But sixty dollars is altogether too much for that shelving," protested the stationer and real estate dealer.

"Can't do it for less, Amos. The stuff cost me over thirty dollars."

"Make it fifty-five dollars."

"Can't do it, Amos. I'm a poor man, and——"

"You're worth more than I am, and I won't pay a cent more than fifty-seven dollars."

"Well, all right, then; but the job's worth more."

Tom Allon turned to go to work, and Amos Bemis faced Joe.

He had not noticed who the newcomer was at first, and now his face changed color slightly.

"Well, Joe, what's wanted?"

"I want to see you in private, Mr. Bemis."

"Who sent you?"

"Nobody; I came on my own account."

"Well, there ain't no place here, and I can't leave just now."

"I must see you," returned the boy firmly.

"I'm going for some tools," put in Tom Allon suggestively. "I'll be back in quarter of an hour."

He walked out of the store, leaving the two alone. For the moment Joe did not know how to begin. He felt that he must approach the stationer cautiously if he wished to gain the object of his visit.

"Well, now we're alone, what's wanted?" demanded Amos Bemis.

"I came to see about that safe robbery," began Joe.

"I thought you said you would allow that matter to rest?" was Amos Bemis' somewhat uneasy reply.

"I want to ask you a few questions, that's all."

"Maybe I won't answer 'em, Joe."

"Why not?"

"I am not getting myself into trouble for your benefit."

"Yes, but you want to keep out of trouble, don't you?" ventured the boy, talking very largely in the dark.

"Of course, and that's what I'm doing."

"But I want to know how you came by that which was stolen."

"I found it."

"Where?"

"Never mind that."

"Why won't you tell me?"

"Didn't I say that I wasn't going to get into trouble?"

"How long ago did you find it?"

"I won't say a word."

"I think you will."

"Ha! do you threaten me?" gasped Amos Bemis, and his dried-up face actually grew pale.

"I want to know the whole truth," declared Joe, putting on a bold front, "and if you'll tell me that I won't prosecute you."

"And if I don't?"

"You had better speak up, Mr. Bemis. I am going to sift this matter to the bottom. Do you know that Sam Ridd, the agent for Bart Pangler, was arrested last night?"

It was a random shot, but it told. Amos Bemis staggered back, and Joe felt that he had struck the right track.

"What—what have I got to do with all this?" he demanded, but in a feeble voice.

"Is there any need to tell you?"

"I never had anything to do with that man Ridd. I don't even know him. You are talking to me in riddles."

Amos Bemis began to bluster, but in the midst of his talk Joe stopped him.

"Tell me at once where you found that thing," he said sternly. "No more trifling."

"I won't."

"Then tell me where you stole it."

"Me? Stole it!" howled Amos Bemis. "Are you going mad, boy?"

"Not a bit of it."

"I never stole anything in my life."

"That is what I told you, Amos Bemis, but you would not believe it."

"But you took the tin box——"

The stationer broke off short.

"Go on," said Joe, not surprised at the declaration. "Go on and tell me where you got the tin box painted blue."

"I found it in the gully!" burst out Amos Bemis.

"Down by the Coal Road?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"About four months ago."

"How did you happen to be down there?"

"I was looking over some ground that was to be sold for a party in Philadelphia."

"Why didn't you turn over the deed in the box to father at the time?"

"See here, didn't you say that you would drop the matter if I let up on you?" demanded Amos Bemis, who was beginning to squirm under this fire of questions.

"Were you going to try to get the land in your own hands?" went on Joe.

"No, I wasn't."

"It looks very much like it, unless——"

"Unless what?" growled the real estate dealer.

"Unless you intended to let Bart Pangler have the deed."

At the mention of Bart Pangler's name Amos Bemis grew paler than ever.

"What do you know about him?" he cried, quickly. "Tell me at once, Joe?"

"I know he is a villain and he is doing his best to defraud father out of his right to some land which has valuable oil wells upon it. And you are in with him."

"I am not. Pangler is my enemy as well as the enemy of your father."

This was certainly news to Joe, and for the moment he said nothing.

"That's why I held back the paper," went on the stationer. "I thought Bart Pangler had an interest in the land, and I wanted to get square with him. When your father was so sick I thought he was going to die,

and I knew if that happened Pangler would get the deed somehow and neither you nor your sister would get a cent out of the property. I reasoned that if I kept the deed and you were left alone I would get the property for you, and you would pay me for my trouble."

"Perhaps," said Joe sarcastically. "But it's more than likely that you would have scooped in the property for yourself. But that's not here nor there just now. I've something to do."

"What—what do you intend to do, Joe?" asked Amos Bemis faintly.

"I'm going to find that deed which was taken from the safe."

"What! didn't you take it?" gasped Amos Bemis.

"No; I had nothing to do with it. It was stolen by Ridd and Olney. It was only by accident that I stumbled on a clew which made me suspect that you had had the tin box."

"And you didn't know it when we were talking at the jail?" faltered Amos Bemis.

"No. I saw you were unusually excited and worried, and I let you go ahead and imagine what you pleased. It worked well, too."

The real estate dealer sank back on one of the store chairs. He felt too cheap for the time being to say another word.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### JOE GOES ON A HUNT

A FEW minutes after Joe had revealed to Amos Bemis the true state of affairs concerning the missing land deed Tom Allon came into the store, so without further words the boy left the place.

"It was just as I thought," he said to his father and Meg quarter of an hour later. "Amos Bemis had the box, and it was stolen by Olney and Ridd. Now the thing is to locate Olney."

"I am afraid you will have a job to do that," said Mr. Hurley. "He will keep out of the way, you may rest certain."

"And so will Bart Pangler," put in Meg. "Oh, but they must be rascals of the first water!"

"They are," said her father. "And, Joe, if you go on a hunt for them you must be careful, for Pangler, if cornered, might grow desperate."

"I'll keep my eyes and ears open," replied the boy. "Which way did Mr. Lumley go?"

"He did not state the direction."

"Well, pack me up a lunch, will you, Meg? I may not come home till dark."

Meg complied with the request, and, after putting on his strong mountain boots, Joe set out on his hunt.

His first course was toward the Coal Road, he feeling certain that Olney would strike off for that vicinity.

He thought it quite likely that both Olney and Pangler would not, for the present, dare to go to either Harrisburg or Philadelphia to complete their nefarious transactions.

"I would like to know if Pangler knows Olney had the missing deed," mused Joe, as he hurried along. "Evidently not, from what Philander Pardone said. Perhaps Olney will hold out for a big price for the last bit of paper by which this transfer of property to that man Morton can be made."

Joe had gone all of two miles, when he beheld a well-known figure stalking towards him. It was Dan Yates, the hunter.

"Hullo, Joey, where bound now—after some o' the rascals?"

"You've struck it, Dan," returned the boy. "I want to see if I can't trace up Olney, or, possibly, Bart Pangler."

"Do ye know, I half believe I saw that Olney back a way on the Ridgewood Claim," went on Dan Yates. "I seed somebody a sneakin' along down by the Back Road, an' I don't know who it could have been if it wasn't him."

"How long ago was this, Dan?"

"Not more'n an hour."

"Then I'm off in that direction."

"All right. I'd go with you if it wasn't that I had to take this string of woodcock to the tavern," and as he spoke Dan Yates held up over two dozen of the birds.

"Never mind, Dan, I can go alone. You didn't meet Mr. Lumley, did you?"

"No."

Dan Yates passed on, and Joe turned his steps toward the Ridgewood Claim, as a dense patch of brush to the north of the Coal Road was called.

He well understood that the search might easily be termed an almost hopeless one, yet something compelled him to continue in his quest.

For over an hour he tramped one direction or another without seeing or hearing anything of special value.

He was beginning to grow tired of this, when the low murmur of voices suddenly broke upon his ears.

The sounds came from somewhere in the vicinity, but for a long time Joe could not locate them.

He looked to the right and the left and up in the trees on all sides, but it was useless.

With extreme caution he pushed his way forward and presently came upon a small hill, which, on the opposite side, slanted down abruptly toward a cave-in on the mountain side.

To one side of this hill was the entrance to a very high and narrow cave, the opening banked on one side by sharp rocks and on the other by bramble bushes, which in that neighborhood seemed to flourish thickly.

In front of the cave sat two men. The two men were Olney and Bart Pangler.

A low fire burned close at hand, and over this they were heating a tin full of water. Some provisions scattered about denoted that they had just finished a meal.

"I feel decidedly better now," Olney was saying. "I was half starved before."

"It won't do for us to remain here any great length of time," said Bart Pangler. "I've got to put that deal through soon or it won't go."

"When do you start for Philadelphia?"

"To-day."

"Will you take the train from Ironton?"

"I don't know yet. Perhaps it would be better to borrow a horse somewhere and ride to Ryan's Crossing."

"There's a train stops at the Crossing at five and another at six o'clock," went on Olney after a pause. "You might take one of them. Is Morton expecting you?"

"I reckon so. I telegraphed to New York for him to come on to Philadelphia. I know he is mighty anxious to buy the land and open up the wells."

"Supposing Hurley comes down on him later?"

"Well, I won't be around at that time," laughed Bart Pangler. "But I don't see how Hurley can come down on him after I get the thing settled in my own way. It would get into court, and Morton could fight him off easily, especially as he is rich."

"Well, the sooner you get out of it the better," said Olney. "I am anxious for my own money."

"You shall have it just as soon as I get mine."

"And how about Ridd?" went on Olney, after a pause.

"Well, if I were you I'd let him stay where he is. We are done with him now."

"Wouldn't try to get him out?"

"Oh, well, if bail is set at a low figure we might go it in a roundabout way and give him a chance to clear out. But I wouldn't go much on him."

The conversation continued in this strain for fully quarter of an hour. Joe listened with breathless interest, and for the first time fully realized the depth of the rascals' villainy.

The boy was in a quandary as to what to do. Would it be safe to leave the spot and go back to Mountainville for assistance?

He was afraid that if he did this he would be too long in returning, and would find the vicinity of the cave deserted.

"No, I had better follow them up on the sly until

we get near to some spot where I can summon help," he said to himself.

So he remained behind the bushes while Olney put away some of the provisions which had not been consumed, and Bart Pangler disappeared into the interior of the cave.

A minute or so later the chief of the rascals reappeared. He carried in his hand the long-lost box painted blue.

"It was a stroke of luck to discover that Amos Bemis had this in his possession," he chuckled. "How on earth did you discover it, Doc?"

"I learned of it one day when I was spying around the store," was Olney's reply. "He was looking at it in front of his old safe. I learned the combination of the safe-lock at the same time."

"It's a wonder you didn't take something else when you took this," laughed Bart Pangler.

"Oh, I got something before that."

"You did?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"Never mind."

"By the boots! I'll bet you took that pocketbook the boy was accused of stealing!" declared Bart Pangler suddenly. "Isn't it so?"

Doc Olney laughed heartily.

"You've struck it."

"It's a wonder I didn't think of it before."

"Well, we can't always think of everything. But say, is that deed all right?"

"That's what I'm going to find out."

Bart Pangler sat down on a rock, and together the rascals bent over the blue tin box.

It was not locked and in a second they had it open and had drawn forth a faded bit of yellow paper having attached to it a ribbon and several seals.

Bart Pangler read several paragraphs from the old deed and then nodded approvingly.

"Yes, it's all right," he said.

"And that puts you on the right track of the property?"

"Yes, I can go right ahead with Morton."

"Good."

Bart Pangler continued to read on. Joe watched him closely. How the boy wished he could get hold of that precious bit of paper!

"I wonder if I could rush in, grab the paper and get away?" he thought. "It would be a dangerous game, but isn't it worth the trying?"

It certainly would be a dangerous, not to say foolhardy, proceeding, but Joe was so anxious to secure his father's property that he did not think of the personal peril involved.

He was about to shift his position in order to gain a

place directly behind the two criminals, when an unexpected interruption occurred.

There was a crashing of the bushes on the other side of the little clearing, and a second later Ralph Lumley stepped into sight.

## CHAPTER XXX

### AN ALL-ROUND ENCOUNTER

It was evident that the surveyor had come upon the two rascals quite unexpectedly, for he was so surprised that for the instant after stepping into the clearing he stood perfectly still, with his eyes full of wonder.

As for Olney and Bart Pangler, they jumped up in alarm. The latter stuffed the old deed in his pocket.

"Hullo! so I've found you, eh?" exclaimed Ralph Lumley as soon as he could recover.

"What do you want here?" demanded Bart Pangler in an ugly tone.

"I reckon you know perfectly well, Bart Pangler," returned the surveyor. "I am quite sure you have not forgotten me."

"No, I can't say that I have."

"Then there is no use to waste words."

"No, there isn't," retorted the rascal, drawing himself up. "And the best thing you can do is to clear out."

"When I do that Olney will go with me."

"Not much!" put in Olney. "You seem to forget that we are two to one."

The look on the surveyor's face fell a little, but he quickly recovered.

"That makes no difference to me, Olney. You are an outlaw, and I shall take pleasure in putting you where you belong."

"Perhaps you won't have no such easy job as you imagine you'll have," growled the other suggestively.

"If you want to keep out of trouble you had better make tracks," said Bart Pangler. "We came here to escape being disturbed, and——"

"To escape being sent to prison," finished Ralph Lumley.

"Shut up, you fool!"

As Pangler uttered the last words, he sprang forward and tripped the surveyor up.

"Jump on him, Doc!" he cried. "He must not get away from us!"

"Just what I'm thinkin'!" returned Olney. "He would set a crowd out to capture us before we could leave the mountains."

Both men bore down upon Ralph Lumley, but before they could do much harm, Joe sprang from behind his cover.

"Hi! let that man alone!" he yelled, as he aimed a blow at Olney with a stick he carried.

The sound of his voice thoroughly alarmed the rascals, and both started back.

"Joe!" called out Ralph Lumley. "You came in the nick of time."

"It's Hurley's boy!" shouted Bart Pangler, in a rage. "He must have been with Lumley!"

Olney dodged the blow Joe aimed at him, but in doing so tripped over a rock and fell beside the surveyor, and in an instant the two were having a sharp struggle between them.

Then Bart Pangler sprang at Joe. As has been said before, he was a powerful man, and although Joe tried to defend himself, he was no match for the man. He struck Pangler once on the shoulder, and then went down, with the other on top of him.

"Now I've got you, you little scamp!" muttered Pangler. "I'll fix you for playing the spy!"

He made a clutch for Joe's throat, but the boy squirmed out of his reach.

"Help! help!" he cried. "Mr. Lumley!"

"I've got Olney," panted the surveyor. "Run for it, Joe, run!"

"He'll do nothing of the kind," put in Bart Pangler. "We are on top to stay in this game."

Once more he did his best to pin Joe to the ground, and once again the boy squirmed from underneath him.

Then, just as Joe thought his opponent really meant to take his life, a ruse came to his fertile mind.

"Hullo! Jack! Dick! This way. Here they are! Jack! Dick!"

"He's got friends here!" gasped Olney in terror. "I thought they wouldn't tackle us single-handed!"

"Confound the luck!" howled Bart Pangler.

"Jack! Dick! Dan!" continued Joe. "Here we are, by the old cave! The old cave!"

This was too much for Bart Pangler. If there were three others in the neighborhood besides Joe and Ralph Lumley he thought it best to get out of sight as quickly as possible.

"Come on, Doc, this is no place for us!" he cried, and hitting Joe a parting blow on the chest, he started up and away.

"Hi! hi! don't leave me!" roared Olney. "Don't leave me behind!"

He struggled with renewed vigor and at last succeeded in getting away from the surveyor. Then he made a dash for the bushes.

But before he had gone ten steps Joe was up and after him. The boy put out his foot, and in a flash Olney went head first into a mass of brambles.

His face was torn in several places and the howl he gave made Bart Pangler believe that he had been shot.

"Help! help!" screamed Olney. "I'm all stuck to death! Help me out of these infernal bushes!"

In spite of the seriousness of the affair both Joe and the surveyor were forced to laugh at Olney's predicament.

At length they hauled the unfortunate man out of

the brambles. He was covered with blood, but not seriously hurt, yet he did not offer to run away.

"If you watch him I'll go after Bart Pangler," said Joe.

"Alone?" queried Ralph Lumley.

"Yes."

"Are you not afraid?"

"I'll keep a good lookout to see that he does not get his hands on me again. He must not escape."

"Well, do as you think best."

"But, will you see that Olney is locked up?"

"Yes?"

Joe waited to hear no more. He caught up his stick, or, more properly speaking, club, and dashed off through the woods at top speed in the direction Pangler had pursued.

He could hear the rascal forging ahead on the run, the crashing of brush and cracking of dry twigs reaching Joe's ears plainly.

Joe was a swift runner and he kept close behind Pangler for a distance of half a mile. Then a long road was reached running in a semicircle toward Ryan's Crossing.

Down this road sped Bart Pangler, with Joe not quite two hundred yards behind him. Several times the villain disappeared around a curve, but he reappeared again each time.

"He's bound for Ryan's, that's certain," thought

Joe. "If he wasn't he'd leave the road in double-quick order."

Presently a farmhouse appeared in sight, not a hundred yards from where Joe had last seen Bart Pangler. A second later the rascal reappeared—he had disappeared around a curve as before—and the boy saw him make for a horse and wagon which was hitched to a post near by.

"Hi! stop!" cried the boy. "Stop the thief!"

The effect of this call was to bring two men from the house on the run. But before they could realize what was up Pangler had the hitching-strap cut and was in the wagon and off.

"He's a thief!" cried Joe. "Stop him!"

"Stop there!" roared one of the men. "He's got your horse, Burns!"

Both men joined Joe in springing ahead to catch the rear end of the wagon.

But they were too late. Bart Pangler had seized the whip and was lashing the horse, and the animal shot forward at a speed which soon left all three pursuers far behind.

"The hoss thief!" roared Burns, the owner of the turn-out. "What do you know about him, boy?"

"I know that he is a fugitive from justice and that we must catch him," returned Joe. "Have you another horse handy?"

"Bring out your nag, Simpson, and quick. He's a criminal, eh?"

"Yes. Hurry if you want to catch him, for he's bound for Ryan's Crossing to catch the train."

"Then he won't take my horse any further than that," observed Burns, with a look of relief.

"That's so, but he must be caught," said Joe earnestly. "Won't you lend me a horse? I—I'll give you ten dollars, all I have."

His earnestness won over the one called Simpson at once.

"Come to the stable," he said. "You can have Jack, and Burns and I will follow in the wagon with Nance."

They all went to the stable on a run. Two minutes later Joe was astride of a big black horse and off on a mad gallop to catch Bart Pangler.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### A CHASE ON HORSEBACK

THE horse upon which Joe was mounted was a work horse, heavy built and clumsy, and so despite the boy's greatest efforts to urge him forward, the animal made but slow progress.

Bart Pangler was long since out of sight around an upper bend of the road.

"He'll make Ryan's Crossing long before I do," thought Joe. "But perhaps I'll get there before the next train goes through. Of course he'll try to catch a train before those in the evening he and Olney mentioned."

Joe wondered how Ralph Lumley was faring with his prisoner, and if he would have any trouble in getting Olney to the Mountainville jail.

After the turn just mentioned was passed Joe reached a straight bit of road all of two miles long.

He looked along this eagerly and was gratified to see Bart Pangler and his turn-out in the distance.

Evidently the rascal was urging his horse forward at top speed, for he stood upright in the wagon and made

movements with his right arm which Joe rightly took to be whip-strokes on the horse's back.

In some spots the road was deep with dust, and often the turn-out ahead was hidden in a perfect cloud.

But further on another patch of woods was reached, and here, in the darkest parts, were deep pools of water, ruts and holes, over and through which the wagon made comparatively poor progress.

"I wish he'd tumble into the biggest kind of a hole," thought Joe. "He deserves to be pitched out on his head, and—there he goes, as sure as fate!"

Joe was right. Maddened by the delay, Bart Pangler had struck his horse a vicious blow just as the wagon was entering a deep rut. The consequence was that the beast swerved to one side and kicked up, and in a twinkling the vehicle turned over.

Bart Pangler pitched out on his hands and knees, just escaping a header into a mud-hole close at hand.

The wagon was badly wrecked, one wheel going completely to pieces.

Almost before the fugitive could rise Joe rode up, the club still in his hand.

"You had better give in, Pangler," he cried. "You can't escape now."

"The old Nick take you!" howled Pangler. "Do you want me to take your life?"

"I don't imagine you'll do that," said Joe. "Perhaps you don't know that I carry a pistol with me."

"What of that? Do you think you can force me to go back with you single-handed?"

"I'll make a try at it."

Pangler came forward slowly, an evil glitter in his dark eyes. In spite of himself Joe had to shiver.

"I'm too old to give in to a boy," said the man harshly. "The best thing you can do is to turn around and go back to where you came from."

"I'll not do it."

"You won't, eh?"

"No."

With a suddenness which was surprising, the rascal leaped forward and struck Joe a blow across the face with the whip, which he still held in his hand.

The crack caused Joe to forget his position for the moment, and in that space of time Pangler caught the horse by the head and threw him upon his haunches.

Joe slid back, and even the reins did not keep him from going to the ground, almost under the animal's hind hoofs.

Pangler backed the horse until one hoof struck Joe, causing the boy to roll over on his side.

Then, like a flash, the man leaped upon the horse and made off.

"Now, don't you dare to follow again!" he called back; "that is if you value your life!"

And he disappeared up the road, going at the top speed of the horse he was riding.

For several seconds Joe was dazed. Then a realization of what had happened burst upon him and he sprang to his feet.

He was in time to see Pangler disappear on the side road which led to Ryan's Crossing, still a long distance away.

"Gone!" groaned the boy. "Gone! What a fool I am!"

Then Joe's eyes rested on the horse attached to the broken down wagon, and his face brightened up.

"Just the thing! I'll have him yet, or else know the reason why!"

With a feverish haste he pulled out his pocket-knife. Slash, slash, the traces were cut and the horse was free.

Gathering up the reins, Joe jumped upon the animal's back and started after Pangler, not two minutes after that individual had disappeared.

"This ought to be a better horse than the other was," thought Joe. "He looks better, anyway."

But the boy soon noticed that the steed was afflicted with a slight lameness. He went along fairly well, but no better than the animal Pangler was now riding.

The cross-road reached, Joe saw Pangler riding along still at top speed. A minute later came the sound of a locomotive whistle echoing through the mountains.

"That's a train at Ironton," said Joe to himself.

"It will be down to the Crossing in five or six minutes more. Perhaps Pangler will be able to catch it."

On and on went the man, and the boy after him. Soon the little station known as Ryan's Crossing appeared in sight, and just beyond it the train could be seen.

In a minute more it would stop at the Crossing. The question was, How long would it remain there before starting once more on its journey?

Bart Pangler was urging his horse forward in every possible way. The poor animal was covered with foam and showed every sign of dropping in his tracks.

While Joe was still several hundred yards behind him the rascal reached the shanty which was by courtesy termed the depot. He made a leap to the ground and ran with all speed for the train, which just then came to a halt.

"Stop him!" cried Joe. "He is a thief!"

Only three men were at the depot, and of these but one heard the boy's cry.

"What's that?" he queried, running toward Joe.

"Stop that man who just rode up! He is a thief."

"A thief?"

"Yes. Stop him quick!"

By this time the conductor had given the signal and the train was once more under way. Bart Pangler was on one of the front cars, looking backward anxiously to see what might become of Joe.

The man Joe had addressed tried to draw the attention of the conductor and have the train stopped, but his effort was futile. The train went on, the last car passing the little platform just as Joe dismounted.

The boy's chagrin was great. His long ride had been in vain. Bart Pangler and the precious deed were once more out of his reach.

Joe made a wild run to catch the tail-end of the train, which each moment gained speed on its way.

The run was of no avail. The distance between the last platform and the boy grew greater, and in ten seconds the matter was decided. Joe had failed.

"That man's a thief, eh?" cried the fellow who had spoken before.

"Yes, he is," returned Joe, bitterly. "And I want to catch him the worst way."

"He's out of your reach just now," put in another of the men.

"Where is that train bound for—Philadelphia?"

"No, it runs to Bradley's, and there makes a connection with the regular."

"How far is it to Bradley's from here?"

"About twenty-six miles."

"Then that train will get there in about an hour?"

"Just an hour."

"And when will he be able to get a Philadelphia train at Bradley's?"

"Not for two hours from now."

"Too bad! I can't drive to Bradley's in two hours, no matter how hard I try."

"Then you are determined to catch him?" went on the first man, with increasing interest.

"I am. Can I telegraph to hold him?"

"There is no operator here. So you want him, eh?"

"Yes, yes, I *must* catch him. I'd give all I'm worth to run him down!"

"Has he stolen much?"

"He's stolen enough, and he's on his way to steal a good deal more."

"Humph!" the man mused for a moment. "I'm on this section to inspect the tracks. I might take you the best part of the way to Bradley's on my hand-car."

"Oh, will you? I'll pay you as soon as I get back and get some money. That man is trying to defraud my father out of a valuable mine."

"What is your name?"

"Joe Hurley."

"Hurley? Are you the son of John Hurley, who is laid up with rheumatism?"

"Yes."

"I know your father well. I'm Andy Barington, of Harrisburg. We used to have dealings when he was in the plumbing business."

"Did you?" cried Joe, eagerly. "Then you must know the man I am after. His name is Bart Pangler."

"Pangler! That old fraud! Indeed, I know him to my sorrow. So he's the fellow, eh?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll help you willingly, Joe. Come on; there is no time to lose, for the down train will be along soon, and we want to get down to the two-mile double before that."

Andy Barington led the way to the other side of the depot. Here stood a hand-car ready for use.

The other men helped them lift it on the tracks, and a minute later the man and the boy were working the handles vigorously, as they spun down the track toward Bradley's Junction.

"If I don't catch him at Bradley's I'll follow him right to Philadelphia," was Joe's thought. "He'll find he can't shake me off as easily as he thinks."

## CHAPTER XXXII

### ON THE TRAIN

JOE was now fully aroused to the importance of catching Bart Pangler, and that without delay.

He realized to the fullest extent what a deep rascal Pangler was, and how, if he was not captured, the villain would defraud his father out of many thousands of dollars.

Joe was only a country boy, brought up in the mountainous districts of Pennsylvania, but he was by no means dull, as we are aware, and now he was on his mettle.

The hand-car spun along the rails at a rate of twenty miles an hour, but when they came to the two miles of double track, which was down grade, Andy Barington allowed the speed to decrease to ten miles an hour.

Just as they were nearing the end of the double track the down train passed them.

"Now we've got a clear track to within half a mile of Bradley's Junction," said Barington. "So let her spin, Joe."

The boy was willing, and soon they were going at a rate of thirty miles an hour.

"Hang on when we get to the curve ahead!" shouted Andy Barington.

The warning came just in time, for had not Joe clung close to the handle of the car he would have been flung off on the sharp curve which was reached a second later.

"You've got to get used to riding on one of these cars," observed the man, after the danger was passed. "I've known several poor fellows flung to their deaths in that way."

It was not a great while before the church spires of Bradley's Junction appeared in the distance. A cloud of smoke hung around the depot.

"That's from the train Pangler was on," said Barington. "It's just leaving for the round-house."

Barington brought the hand-car to a standstill in a near by freight yard, and Joe hopped off.

"I'm sorry I can't go with you to hunt up Pangler," said the man, who had brought him to the place. "But I must lose no time in getting back to Ryan's Crossing."

"Well, I won't forget your kindness," replied Joe.

"That's all right. Let me hear how you make out."

"I will."

Joe left the freight yard and sneaked by a back way up to the depot.

The platform here was crowded with people, many of whom had been passengers on the train.

The boy made a hasty, but thorough search for Pangler, but could see nothing of the rascal.

It was not long before Joe ran across a policeman, and to this official he related his story.

"I didn't see the man," said the policeman. "But that's not strange, for I don't keep track of all people who use the trains. Let us take a hunt around town."

"But we must be back here before the next train goes out."

"Certainly."

So the two made a tour of the town, or, rather, village, for Bradley's Junction was little else. They visited the hotel, the two restaurants, the stores, and walked around the stables and private dwellings.

The search was unproductive. Not a trace of Bart Pangler could be found anywhere.

"It's time to go back to the station now," said the policeman. "I'll tell you what we'll do. You watch on one side of the platform and I'll watch on the other. If you see him, whistle for me. I reckon you can whistle loud enough if you want to."

So back to the station they made their way. The policeman lounged carelessly against a post, as if not looking for any one in particular, and Joe, on the opposite side of the track, secreted himself behind a pile of trucks and boxes.

Soon the whistle of the incoming train was heard,

and a minute later the locomotive and the train of cars rolled into the depot.

There were fully a score of people to get on the train and half as many to get off, so for the time being the station became lively and as bustling as before.

Joe watched every passenger eagerly, but while the cars stood still Bart Pangler did not appear. But when the train began to move a man rushed from behind the station and boarded the middle car.

It was the fellow Joe was seeking.

The boy gave a loud whistle, which was lost in the ringing of the locomotive bell and the puffing of the engine, and leaped forward to stop Pangler.

He was too late.

"I won't be left now," muttered Joe to himself, as he saw Pangler disappear within the car.

The platform of the next car glided past and then the next. Now came the end of the train.

There was no time left to think twice. Joe made a leap and grasped the hand-rails.

It was a dangerous move, and those on the depot platform thought for the moment that the boy would fall off and be killed.

But Joe's grip was a good one, and as soon as he could pull himself together he drew his body up to the platform and entered the car.

The car proved to be a smoker and baggage com-

bined, and it was the latter named end which Joe entered.

No one was present but a baggage clerk, and he had not seen Joe's narrow escape. For the moment Joe stood still, not knowing exactly what to do next.

"Sorry, but you can't remain in here," said the clerk. "It's against orders."

"Does this train go through to Philadelphia?"

"Yes."

"What stops does it make?"

The clerk named several.

"Do you want to know anything about your baggage?" he added.

"No; I haven't even so much as a bag."

The clerk looked at Joe more closely and noted the boy's torn and dusty clothes.

"On the road?" he laughed.

"What do you mean?"

"Are you a tramp?"

"No, indeed!"

"Oh, excuse me, but your clothes——"

"Are pretty dirty, that's a fact," admitted Joe.

"But I was in a mighty big hurry to catch this train. I am after a thief, and he is in one of the forward cars."

"Phew! Was he running away?"

"Yes."

"I suppose you want to have him arrested?"

"I do."

"Well, you'll have to see Johnson, the conductor, about it. He'll be back here presently. I guess the thief won't try to jump from the train now, for we're making up lost time and running at fifty miles an hour."

The clerk persuaded Joe to tell his story while they waited for the conductor's appearance.

"We can walk through the cars and spot him easily enough," said the baggage clerk. "It is not likely that he knows you are on board."

"That's true, unless he was watching me."

— Presently the conductor appeared, and then Joe had to tell his whole story over again.

In the meantime Bart Pangler had entered one of the middle cars, as has been said. But he did not remain there very long.

"Got rid of that boy at last," he said to himself. "But it was a close shave. Hang me if I'm not shaky! I reckon I had better go back to the smoker and try a cigar for my nerves."

He walked back to the smoker and was just about to take a seat near the door leading to the baggage compartment, which was slightly open, when he caught sight of Joe talking to the clerk.

Bart Pangler could at first scarcely believe his eyes. But as soon as he felt certain there was no mistake he

hurried out of the smoker and through several cars to the front of the long train.

“On board after all. It was lucky I discovered him. Now what’s to be done to get out of his sight and reach?”

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### JOE IN PHILADELPHIA

"COME with me and point out the man," said the conductor to Joe after he had heard the boy's story. "We will face him and see what he has to say."

"Won't you have him arrested for me?" asked Joe.

"I'll help you keep him in sight, and you can have him arrested by a policeman at the next station."

The two walked through the train, followed by the baggage clerk, who was anxious to learn how the affair would terminate.

To Joe's intense surprise nothing was seen of Bart Pangler.

"Well, where is he?" asked the conductor, when the front of the train was reached.

"I can't understand it," said Joe slowly. "I am positive he boarded one of the middle cars."

"Did you see anybody at all that looked like him? He might have assumed a disguise, you know."

"I think not, but I'll look again."

Joe walked from the front to the rear, scanning every passenger's face closely.

The result was as before.

"I don't see him. He must have seen me get on and then jumped off on the other side."

"Humph! Well, what are you going to do now?"

"I don't know. Can you let me off?"

"Not until we get to Evoda."

"How far is that?"

"Three miles farther. It's a flag station, but I'll stop for you. But you'll have to pay your fare to the place," added the conductor, suddenly thinking that perhaps Joe was merely playing a game on him in order to get a free ride.

"How much is it?"

"Fifty-five cents."

Joe drew out his purse and counted out the money.

"I've got to be sparing of my cash," he remarked.

"I may have to follow that rascal all the way to Philadelphia."

"Keep your money," returned the conductor. "I only wanted to try you, to see that it was a genuine case. Here we are. Look sharp, for we are behindhand."

He pulled the bell-cord, and the train began to slacken up. With a quick but hearty thanks for what had been done for him, Joe ran to the door of the car, and two seconds later was springing to the ground.

The train at once went on again, and the boy was left standing in front of a small station, backed up by a general store and a saloon.

No men or women were about, but over at one end of the platform two boys were playing a game of throw-the-knife.

Joe walked up to the two boys, and recognized one of them as Jack Martin, who lived in the vicinity of Mountainville.

"Hullo, Jack!" he said. "What are you doing here?"

"Hullo, Joe! I'm spending a week with my cousin here, Tom Allbray. What brought you down?"

"I was on the train looking for a man, but I didn't find him."

"Anybody I know?"

"I guess not."

"Maybe he wasn't on the train."

"Perhaps, but I thought he was. The trouble was he didn't want to see me, and so he kept out of my way."

"Say," put in the second boy suddenly. "There was a passenger on the engine. Maybe he was the man you were looking for."

"A passenger?" cried Joe. "What sort of a looking man was he?"

"Tall and dark, with a slouch hat. He was standing on the foot-board as if he was going to get off, but when the train started up he sprang back into the cab."

"It was the man I was after!" said Joe, bitterly. "He must have crawled over the tender to the engine,

and told the engineer some story to let him remain there."

"Maybe that is it," said Jack Martin. "He might have seen you get off, and that made him stay instead of getting off himself."

"You've struck it, Jack," returned Joe. "Oh, what a fool I've been making of myself!"

"Never mind; perhaps you will catch him yet."

"What is the next train for Philadelphia?"

"None for three hours, but it's a fast train and gets in only a little over two hours after the one that just went by."

Jack Martin and his cousin had to be told the whole story. After it was finished the strange boy invited Joe to his house to get washed up and have supper, and Joe readily accepted.

After the meal was over Joe called Jack Martin aside and through him borrowed a few dollars to be used in case of emergency. Then all three started once again for the depot.

The coming train was flagged, and Joe was soon on board and flying away in the gathering darkness toward Philadelphia.

Joe had never been to Philadelphia—that is, not since he could remember—and he had no idea where he was going or what he would do when he got there. He decided to let matters take their own course.

"I'll find Bart Pangler if I can," he thought. "And

I'll also hunt up this Morton, the capitalist, and warn him not to deal with the rascal."

It was night by the time Philadelphia was reached. For the moment after emerging from the great railroad station the boy was bewildered by the jumble of noises around him.

"Cab, sir! have a cab!"

"This way for the Continental, sir!"

Joe paused on the sidewalk and shook his head. He did not want a cab, and he was certain that he could not afford to put up at the Continental Hotel.

"Paper, sir! Last edition. *Item* or *News*?"

It was a ragged newsboy who brushed up to Joe, piping his cry in a shrill treble voice.

"No, I don't want a paper—but hold on, bubby!"

"Wot yer want?" demanded the urchin, 'as Joe caught him by the arm. "I ain't done nuthin', mister."

"I know you haven't, but I want to find out something."

"Wot?"

"How long have you been around here to-night?"

"Ever since der last edition cum out, five o'clock."

"Do you know anything about the trains—those that come in, I mean."

"Yer bet I do. I'm workin' fer a place as train boy; see?"

"Were you here when the Harrisburg train came in about two hours ago?"

"See here, is dis a game?" demanded the street boy, suspiciously.

"Not exactly. I want to find a man who was on the train, and if you can tell me anything about him I'll give you ten cents—or, no, I'll give you the money anyway. Here you are."

And to make sure that the boy would be honest with him Joe handed over the dime.

"T'ank yer, mister. Now, who's der chap yer want ter find?"

As well as he could Joe gave the newsboy a description of Bart Pangler. He was just finishing, when the boy broke in with a cry.

"Say, wasn't dat feller on der engine?"

"Yes, he was!" exclaimed Joe eagerly. "You've hit the man first time. Now, what became of him?"

"I know somet'ing about him, cos I followed him, t'inkin' he was some railroad big-gun, a-riding on de steam-hoss; see?"

"And what became of him?" asked Joe, impatiently.

"Well, he went out an' took a cab—Dick Slosson's rig."

"Dick Slosson is the driver you mean?"

"Yes."

"Is he here now?"

"Maybe; cum wid me, mister."

The newsboy led the way around a corner to where

a number of cabs were stationed. He looked around, and a shade of disappointment came over his face.

"He ain't here, but—— Here he cums now!"

A cab rattled up to the curb and the driver dismounted.

"Here's a young gent as wants to see yer, Dick," cried the newsboy, pointing to Joe. "He's got business for yer."

"I am looking for the man you took away from here a couple of hours ago," said Joe quickly. "Can you give me his address?"

"I'll take you to him for half a dollar, sir," said the cab driver shrewdly.

"All right, do so at once."

"Jump in."

Joe entered the cab, and, hopping on the box, the cabby started off his horses, and they were soon rattling over the city pavements.

Joe's mind was in a whirl. The following of Bart Pangler had been accomplished more quickly than he had imagined possible. What would happen next?

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### FACE TO FACE WITH PANGLES

THE cab Joe occupied rattled over the Philadelphia pavements at a rapid rate. Soon it turned into a side street, and the boy was bounced on the seat worse than ever.

At last the driver brought the turn-out to a sudden halt.

"Here we are," he said as he jumped down and opened the door.

"Where is the house?" asked Joe, as he stepped to the sidewalk.

"That one with the big railing."

"All right."

Joe turned over the half dollar fare promised. In another moment the cabby was on his seat again and driving off in the darkness.

For a minute Joe stood still, not knowing exactly what to do next. Should he ring the front door bell and boldly inquire for Bart Pangler?

"That might be the right thing to do," he mused,

"and then again it might be quite wrong. If he caught sight of me he'd slip out of the back door, and that would be the end of it."

Joe walked toward the house, which was one of several that set a distance back from the street. He saw that a dim light was burning in the hallway, otherwise the front of the residence was dark.

To one side of the house there was a walk leading to the rear. Looking down this walk Joe saw a light streaming from a back room.

"I'll walk back and see if he is in sight," he thought, and noiselessly he opened the gate.

He made no noise as he proceeded down the walk, and soon found himself close to the windows of a large dining-room.

The shades of the windows were up, and looking into the apartment Joe saw a lady and a gentleman and two girls sitting around the center table, reading.

The family seemed to be very nice people, the gentleman particularly dignified.

"That doesn't look as if Pangler belonged here," thought Joe.

Then a sudden chill swept through his heart. Supposing that cabman had fooled him?

"I'll go to the front door and make inquiries," he concluded, and at once went to the front again.

It was the lady of the house who answered his ring at the bell.

"Good evening, madam," said Joe, politely. "Can you tell me if Mr. Bart Pangler lives here?"

"Mr. Bart Pangler?" she repeated. "No, he does not."

"Can you tell me if he lives close by?"

"I never heard of him before. James!"

The call brought the gentleman to the door, and the lady put Joe's question to him.

"It seems to me that I've heard of the man," was his slow reply. "But he doesn't live around here."

"You are sure?"

"Oh, yes; I know every person on the block, having lived here eighteen years."

"The man might board at Mrs. McFords'," put in the lady. "She has a couple of new boarders."

"And where is that?" questioned Joe eagerly.

"Just one block below here."

"Thank you, I'll try the place. It's queer, though, that the cabman who brought me from the depot should say that this was the very house to which he had brought Bart Pangler."

"Is the man you are looking for your friend?" asked the gentleman of the house, with some curiosity.

"No, he is my enemy, sir."

"Your enemy?"

"Yes, sir. I want to run him down and have him arrested. He is doing his best to cheat my father out

of his interest in a valuable land claim up in the oil region."

"You don't tell me! And you, a mere boy, are trying to run him down?"

"Yes, sir; and I'll do it, too!"

"It seems to me I've heard of this Bart Pangler," mused the gentleman. "It runs in my mind that he swindled some friend of mine, and that was a land transaction, too."

"Excuse me, sir, but do you know Mr. Ralph Lumley?" questioned Joe suddenly.

"The surveyor? Oh, yes; we have offices in the same building. And, by Jove! he is the man this Pangler swindled, come to think of it!"

"I have been working for Mr. Lumley up near Mountainville, and during that time this Bart Pangler, who was once a partner of my father, appeared. He stole several things, and then came to Philadelphia, and I came after him. I'm going to run him down or know the reason why."

Joe spoke so earnestly that the gentleman smiled broadly.

"And what is your name?"

"Joe Hurley, sir."

"Mine is Daniel Peets. Come, I will go out with you to Mrs. McFords'."

Daniel Peets put on his hat, and a moment later the two were on the street.

"Mrs. McFords takes in almost anyone who applies," said the man while on the way. "She is not over-particular so long as she gets her board money, and it's more than likely that that is just the sort of a place this Pangler would seek."

"But why should the cabman tell me he stopped at your place?"

"Perhaps the man did get off there, to avoid being traced. He pretended to enter the house, perhaps, and then waited in the shadow until the cabby had left."

"I see. Well, I hope we find him. I must have him arrested before he has a chance to sell the rights to the claim. If I don't my father will have lots of trouble to get his own, if indeed he can prove his right, which is doubtful."

Mrs. McFords' boarding-house was soon reached. A neat looking Irish girl answered the ring at the bell.

"Yis, sur, Mr. Pangler boards here," she said, in reply to Joe's question.

"And is he in?"

"No, sur. He came in about an hour ago, but he wint right out ag'in, sur."

"Have you any idea where he went?"

The girl shook her head.

"I'll ax Mrs. McFords," she said.

She disappeared in the direction of the kitchen. In two minutes she was back.

"Are you Mr. Olney?" she questioned.

This question nearly staggered Joe. Undoubtedly Bart Pangler had been expecting to meet his ready tool at the place.

"No, I am not, but I would like to know where Mr. Pangler is."

"I can't tell yez. He left word for Mr. Olney, that was all, sur."

"I just came from Olney," said Joe, and this was the literal truth, although he did not add that Olney had been left safe in Ralph Lumley's hands, and was probably by this time in the Mountainville or Ironton jail.

"Oh! Well, he said Mr. Olney was to meet him at Oakley's place."

"Oakley's? Where is that?"

"I know the place," put in Daniel Peets. "Come on. Much obliged," he added to the girl.

They descended to the sidewalk and walked on.

"Oakley's is a restaurant three blocks from here," went on Daniel Peets. "It is frequented by sports and shady characters. You are undoubtedly on the right track at last. Now, what are you going to do?"

"I want Pangler arrested."

"Well, then you had better tell the next policeman we meet."

This was done, and after the official had heard Joe's story he readily consented to go along, especially as Daniel Peets was known to him and consented to take

part in bringing a charge on Ralph Lumley's behalf, taking Joe's word for it that the surveyor would press matters when present.

"I would like to face him alone first," said Joe. "I want to hear what he will say when I confront him."

"That's easy enough," said the policeman. "I and Mr. Peets can go in first and pretend to have some business, and you can come in later. If Pangler is present he will never dream that we are together."

Oakley's was soon reached, and the other two went inside.

Joe waited for nearly five minutes and then followed. He found the restaurant gorgeously fitted up, and about half filled with people.

He looked around eagerly, but was intensely disappointed to find that Bart Pangler was not present.

The policeman and Daniel Peets were standing by the cigar counter, and as Joe passed them, the former whispered:

"Go up stairs in the front room."

Joe looked to one side and saw a narrow stairs leading to the floor overhead.

He lost no time in mounting these, and, despite the stare which a waiter gave him, kept on to the front room the policeman had mentioned.

He found the apartment all but deserted. Only two men were present. They were Bart Pangler and a stranger.

"Yes, Mr. Morton, I have all the papers ready for you," Bart Pangler was saying. "And as I wish to start for the West to-morrow, to be gone five weeks, I do not see why we cannot make this transfer at once."

"I am willing," was the stranger's reply. "I also wish the matter settled, so that I can open up the land and find out whether I have been stuck or not. Have you all the papers?"

"Every one, sir. I procured the last to-day. Here you are, and thirty thousand dollars, cash or check, takes the entire property."

"Well, I guess not, Bart Pangler!"

The swindler jumped up as if shot. He turned deadly pale when Joe confronted him.

## CHAPTER XXXV

### ALL ENDS WELL

"WHAT! you?" gasped Bart Pangler, as he stared at Joe, as if the boy were a ghost:

"Exactly, Bart Pangler, and just in time to prevent you from swindling both this gentleman and my father."

"Where—where did you come from?"

"The depot, direct," replied Joe coolly. "I'll thank you to turn over that stolen deed."

The papers Bart Pangler had produced were lying on the table, but at Joe's words the swindler snatched them up and stuffed them into his pocket.

"You are crazy, boy!" he began, haughtily.

"See here, what is the meaning of this?" burst in the gentleman named Morton. "Who is this boy, Pangler?"

"Oh, he's a half-crazy lad I've known for some years," replied the swindler, who was rapidly recovering his self-possession. "His father was killed suddenly, and he imagines that I am swindling him out of some land, or something of that sort. Come, get out of here!" the last to Joe.

Bart Pangler's cool assertion almost took Joe's breath away. But he did not flinch.

"What he says is not true, sir. This fellow is a swindler, and if you have anything to do with him you will be cheated."

"Get out of here, you crazy fool!" roared Bart Pangler. "If you don't move quick, I'll have the waiters throw you out."

"I don't think you will, Bart Pangler. I know exactly what I'm doing, and you have reached the end of your rope. Sam Ridd and Doc Olney are in jail, and that's where you will be before morning."

"Who are you?" demanded the man named Morton.

"I am Joe Hurley, sir. This man and my father were once partners, and he beat my father out of his interest in the business, and now he is trying to sell you the right to some land which belongs to my father. He is——"

"See here, Morton, don't listen to the boy's crazy talk. It's a pity they let him out of the asylum, and——"

"He doesn't appear to be very crazy," replied Morton, who had been a trifle suspicious of Bart Pangler from the start. "I want to hear his story in full."

"Won't you take my word that it's all straight?" cried Pangler savagely.

"It won't hurt to listen to the lad, and—hullo!" Morton broke off short.

With a muttered exclamation, due to the fact that he realized he was beaten, Bart Pangler had knocked Joe down and sprung for the half-open door.

"Stop him!"

"He's a swindler!"

Joe sprang up as quickly as he could. On the instant the entire upper floor of the restaurant, consisting of half a dozen rooms, appeared to be in an uproar.

Bart Pangler rushed for the half-open door, only to fall into the hands of the policeman who had accompanied Joe to the place.

"Not so fast, my man!" said the official sternly.

"Let go of me! do you hear?" shouted Bart Pangler hoarsely. "I am not to be arrested on a mere suspicion!"

He flung the policeman aside and sent him sprawling backward over a hall chair.

Daniel Peets tried to stop him, but before the gentleman could reach the swindler the latter was on his way to the rear of the establishment.

All started in pursuit, half a dozen waiters joining in. But Joe was ahead, and he landed at the foot of a back stairs within half a minute after Bart Pangler reached that spot.

The swindler had rushed into the kitchen. Joe went after him, and followed into a somewhat dark alleyway which led to the next street.

"You can't escape me, Pangler, and you might as well give in!" cried the boy.

"The Old Nick take you!" howled the swindler. "Go back, or it will be the worse for you, mark my words!"

Joe paid no attention to the warning, and just as Pangler emerged upon the next street he caught the rascal by the coat-tails.

A fierce struggle ensued. Bart Pangler did his best to hammer Joe into insensibility, but his efforts were unavailing. Joe dodged most of his blows, and in return landed his fist on the man's stomach with such force that the rascal was completely winded.

Before Pangler could recover the policeman and two waiters from the restaurant arrived. The policeman had his club drawn and he swung it over Pangler's head savagely.

"Make another move to get away and I'll break your head!" he cried, and his manner showed that he meant what he said.

"I haven't done anything," cried the swindler, but in a more subdued tone. "You will find that that boy is all in the wrong. I haven't any papers belonging to him."

"Search him," said Joe.

"I'll take him to the station-house first," replied the policeman. "You will come along, won't you?"

"Certainly."

Bart Pangler was at once marched to the nearest

station, and here he was examined and his clothing searched.

To Joe's amazement the deed and the other papers the swindler intended to turn over to Morton were missing.

"Perhaps he threw them in the alley," suggested the man who had come so close to being swindled.

So back to the alley they went, Joe accompanied by Morton and Daniel Peets.

Their search was successful. The deeds were found, rolled up in a handkerchief, behind some boxes and barrels.

"That settles it," said Joe. "Now I have these, I don't care what becomes of Bart Pangler."

After giving his testimony against the swindler, Joe hurried off to the nearest telegraph office and sent a dispatch to Ironton, to be taken by special carrier to Mountainville. The telegram was for his father, and read as follows:

"Pangler in jail. Deed recovered. Tell Lumley to come on."

By the kind invitation of Daniel Peets Joe spent the night at that gentleman's residence. Despite the exciting scenes through which he had passed, the boy slept soundly.

While Joe was getting breakfast there was a ring at the bell, and an instant after Ralph Lumley walked in.

"Olney is in jail," he explained. "And I followed you and Pangler from Ryan's Crossing. I was certain you would come straight to Philadelphia."

The surveyor had already learned of Bart Pangler's imprisonment, much to his satisfaction.

"You and your family are all right now, Joe; so there is no need to worry further. After this you will be rich."

Ralph Lumley's words proved correct.

In due course of time Bart Pangler was tried and sentenced to prison for five years. Ridd and Olney accompanied him. Philander Pardone escaped by turning State's evidence and by helping Mr. Podgers to recover the second missing horse.

Five years have passed. Amos Bemis, more sour than ever, still keeps his store in Mountainville, but is doing far from a thriving business. He cannot understand why some folks prosper while he keeps slipping backward. Perhaps he will some day understand that one of the steps to prosperity is a proper regard for the rights of others.

Joe's father is once more in full possession of his health, and is now managing two very valuable oil wells, which are located on the land that the courts decided belonged rightfully to him alone. His neighbor is Ralph Lumley, who also owns two wells that have paid largely since their opening.

Gus Bink, the good-for-nothing, turned over a new

leaf, and was taken in by John Hurley as bookkeeper at the wells. He says his reformation is entirely due to Joe's encouragement.

And what of good-hearted little Meg, you ask? Well, last year she married Ralph Lumley, and they are both very happy. Meg said she could not bear to be too far away from Joe, and as her brother and Ralph had gone into partnership, she took this way of keeping in the circle, much to Ralph's satisfaction.

Joe is now a well-known civil engineer, and he and Ralph have their hands full with government contracts. He loves his work, and says that, for him, there is nothing in the world to equal it.

He admits that it was hard work to gain the situation he now occupies, but he also says that the reward was worth the pains.

"But I am not likely to forget the trials I had when I was merely Joe, the Surveyor," he says, "nor the perils I endured while trying to recover that missing deed and discover the value of the lost claim."

THE END





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